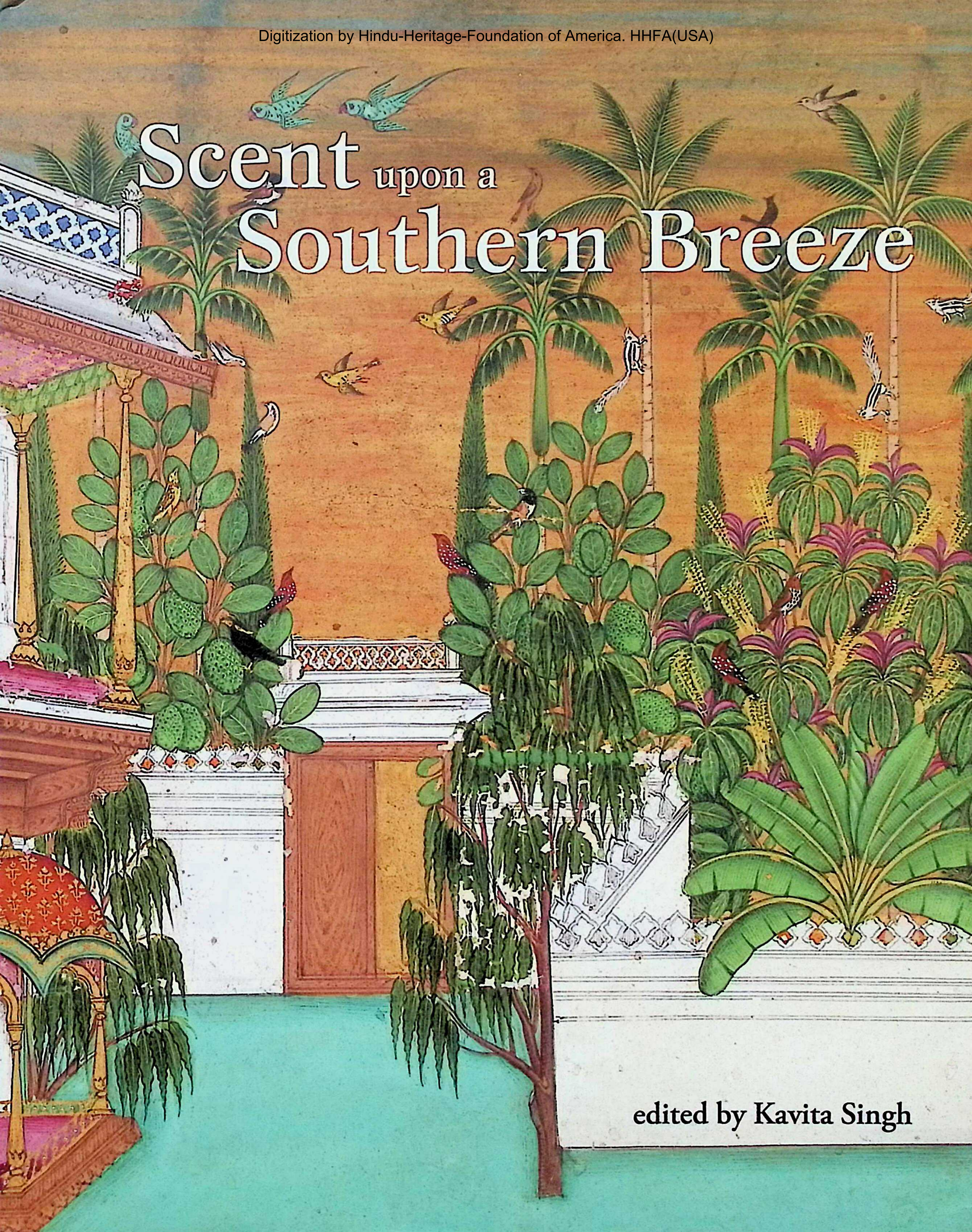

# Scent upon a Southern Breeze

edited by Kavita Singh

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## The Synaesthetic Arts of the Deccan

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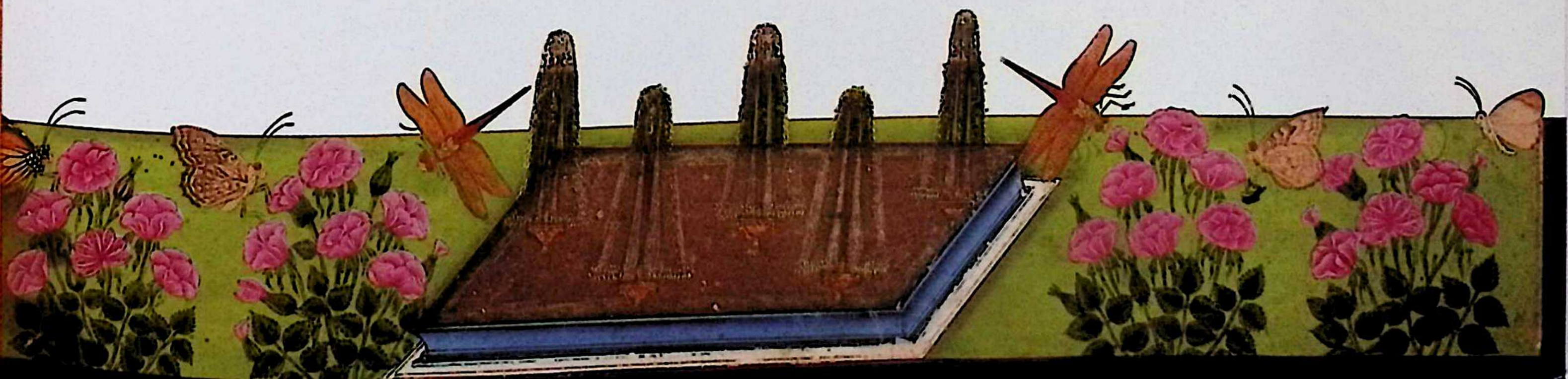
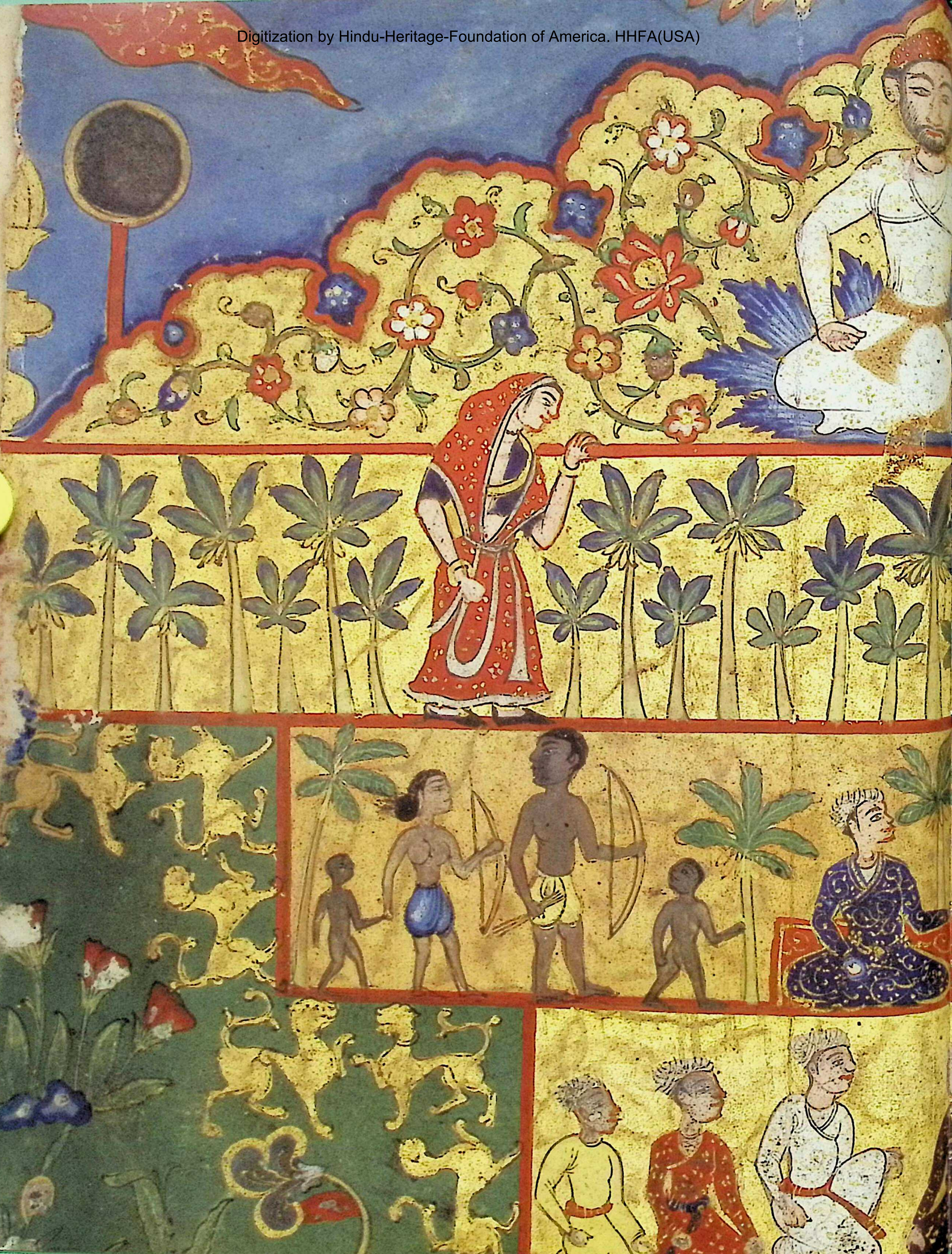
The arts of the Deccan remained understudied for a long while, possibly due to their complex and hybrid nature. This was a coveted region, and many powers fought over its control. What survives of its turbulent history allows us to reconstruct only a fragmentary record of what might have been made in the Deccan. Even in what remains, it is not always easy to put one's finger on what is "Deccani" in Deccani art. Now, in the wake of global art history and its interest in travelling objects and hybridity, Deccani art is increasingly coming into focus. Scholars are bringing new insights to Deccani objects that bear the marks of mixed styles, trade, and even damage and reconstitution.

Drawing from and going beyond the landmark 2015 symposium and exhibition *Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan* held at the National Museum, New Delhi, the essays in this volume explore the sense of wonder, 'aja'ib, that permeated textile design, manuscript illustration and perfume production in the Deccan. Through Ragamala paintings and treatises on magic, perfumery texts and garden architecture, exquisite bidri ware and kalamkaris, the volume shows the way objects and texts can yield an understanding of how beauty was experienced in the past not just through visual means but through sound and smell as well. The book breaks new ground for a sensory turn in Indian art history. Visual objects become crucibles for synaesthetic experiences, as we look upon them with new eyes, or with more than eyes.

Cover – Front: detail of a painting attributed to Rai Venkatachellam, Hyderabad, c. 1795, The David Collection, Copenhagen.
Spine: portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah, Golconda, 1650–1700, Private Collection.
Back: detail of a floral fantasy of animals and birds, Mughal, early 1600s, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

# Scent upon a Southern Breeze





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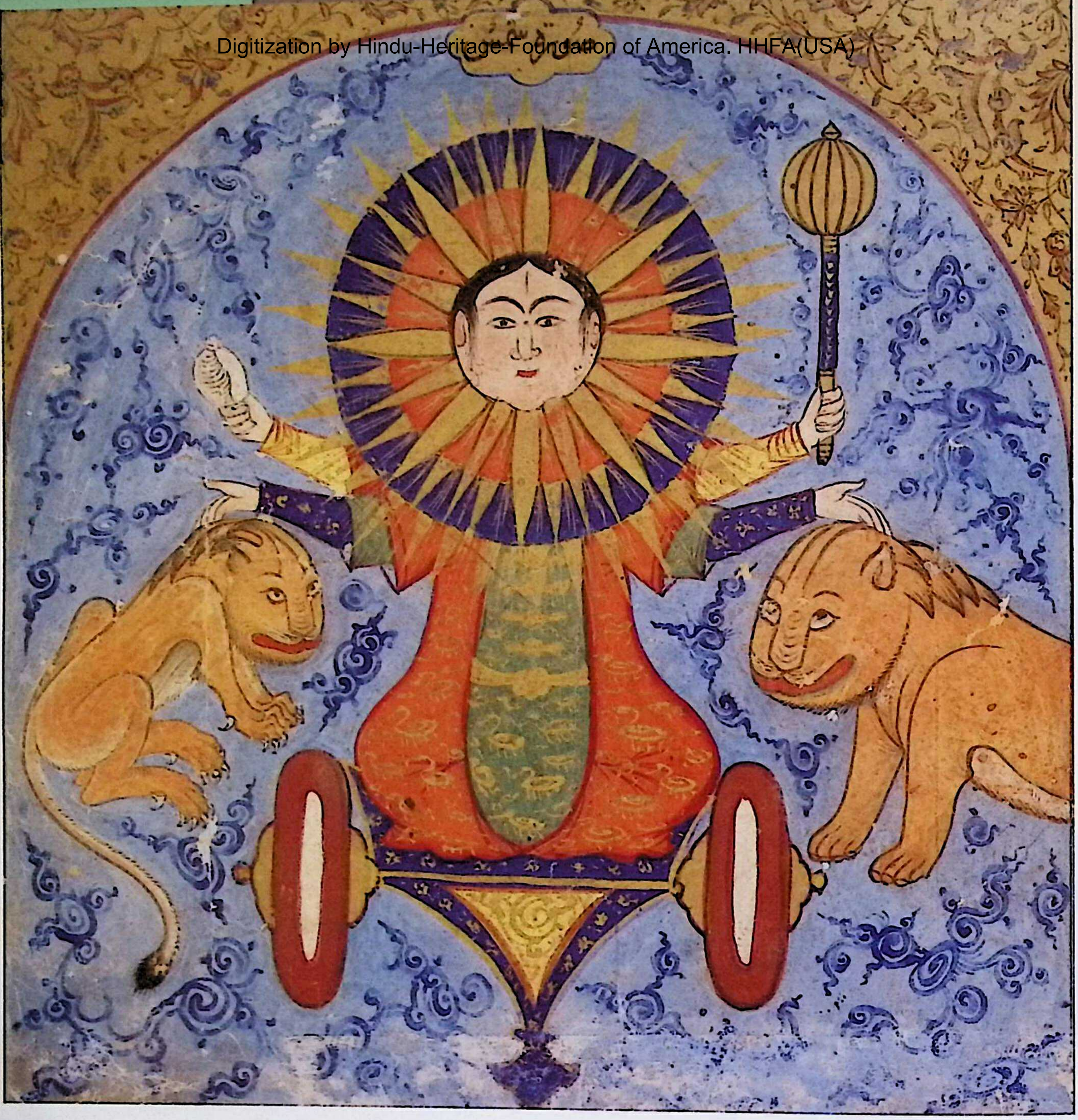

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Page 1: Detail of figure 9, p. 21.
Page 2: Detail of figure 6, p. 78.
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Page 6: "The Sun in His Chariot" from the *Nujum al-'Ulum* of 'Ali 'Adil Shah I, Bijapur, 1570.
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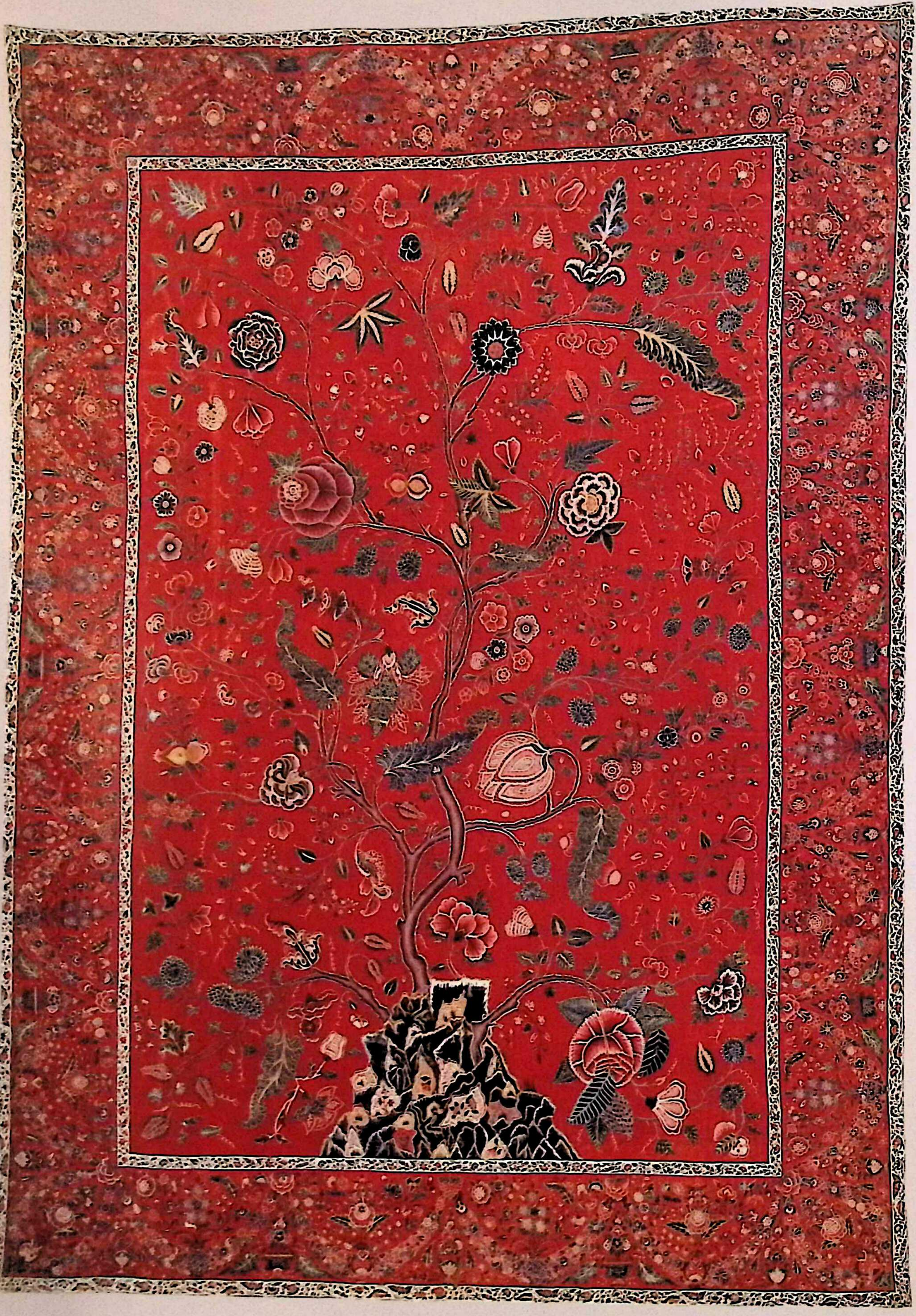


# Scent upon a Southern Breeze

## The Synaesthetic Arts of the Deccan

### *Kavita Singh*

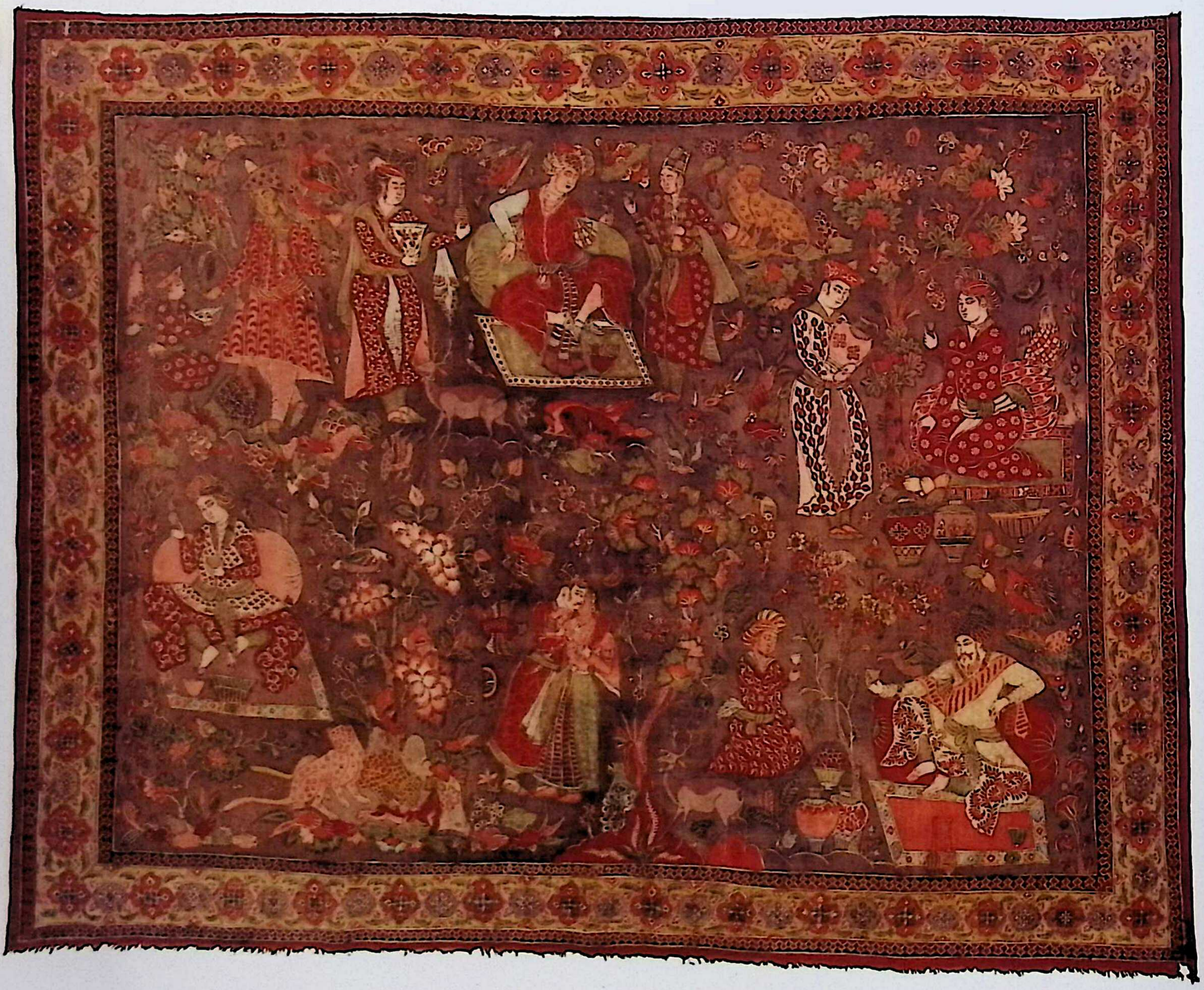
Through its history, the high plateau at the heart of peninsular India was a place of great wealth. It had cotton, grown abundantly on its rich black soil; it had deposits of copper and zinc and gold under the surface of the earth; it had diamonds that burbled out of the soil; it had spice plantations of pepper and cinnamon and cardamom and allspice that could revive the most jaded appetite. But the Deccan's historic wealth lay not just in its natural resources; it lay also in the skills of its craftsmen who could turn these raw materials into finely-wrought products that were sought across the globe. Cotton was transformed here into textiles that were dyed, printed and painted with brilliant and fast colours that were unique to the region, thanks to secret recipes of dyes and mordants unknown in other parts.[1] Supremely gifted textile artists produced designs to suit the tastes of buyers in Southeast Asia, Persia and Europe (figure 1). Expert metalworkers made beautifully-wrought vessels that were in demand across West Asia; not only were the local deposits of copper and zinc used up by this industry, but old vessels were shipped from overseas to be melted down and recast as new ones at factories along the coast to take advantage of Deccani metalworkers' great skill.[2]

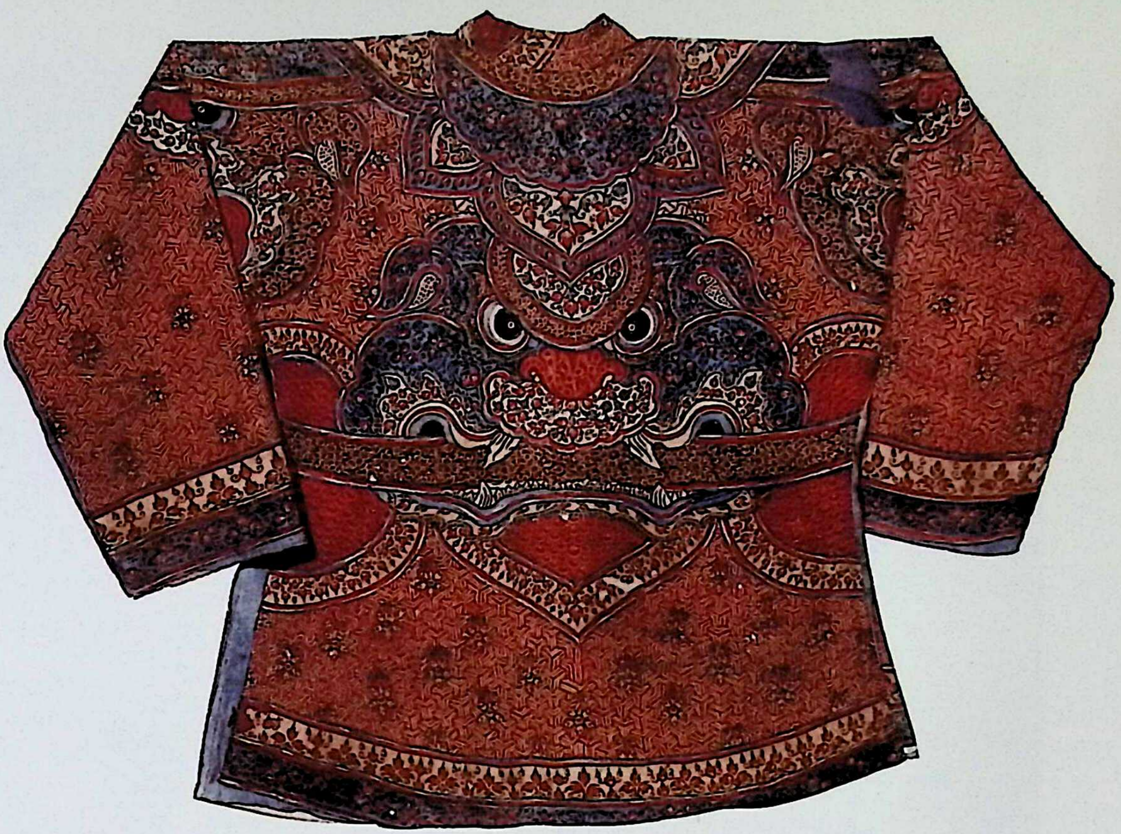
The Deccan's long coastline hosted an extensive maritime economy that throve on trade links with far-off lands. Deccani ports and harbours were nodes in trade routes linking east and west; overland, caravan routes skirted rivers and slipped through passes in peninsular mountain chains. These trade links took Deccani goods overseas; they also brought into the Deccan merchants who carried designs and prototypes of artefacts that would sell well in markets abroad.

The region's natural wealth, thriving industries, strategic location and easy access were not always—or not only—blessings. This was a coveted area, and many powers fought over its control. In the era that is the focus of this volume—approximately the 16th–18th centuries in Bijapur and Golconda—the Deccan saw sultanates established by émigrés from Persia, Turkey and Central Asia who harked back to their ancestral lands for cultural and religious inspiration. But these kingdoms also depended greatly on the local population whose cultural habitus was absorbed into statecraft and courtly

1
Palampore made in Golconda for the European export market, c. 1725–c. 1750. Cotton; plain weave, mordant painted and dyed and resist dyed; 329 × 243 cm. Collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. BK-1971-118.

2
Kalamkari rumal, Golconda, c. 1640–50. Cotton; plain weave, mordant painted and dyed and resist dyed; 81.3 x 88.9 cm. Rogers Fund, 1928. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Acc. no. 28.159.3.





3
Military jacket or Su'a senakut made on the Coromandel Coast for the Thai market, 18th century. Cotton weave; resist drawn, mordant painted and dyed; centre back length 69 cm, sleeve width between cuffs 154.9 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Acc. no. ROM 983.155.1.

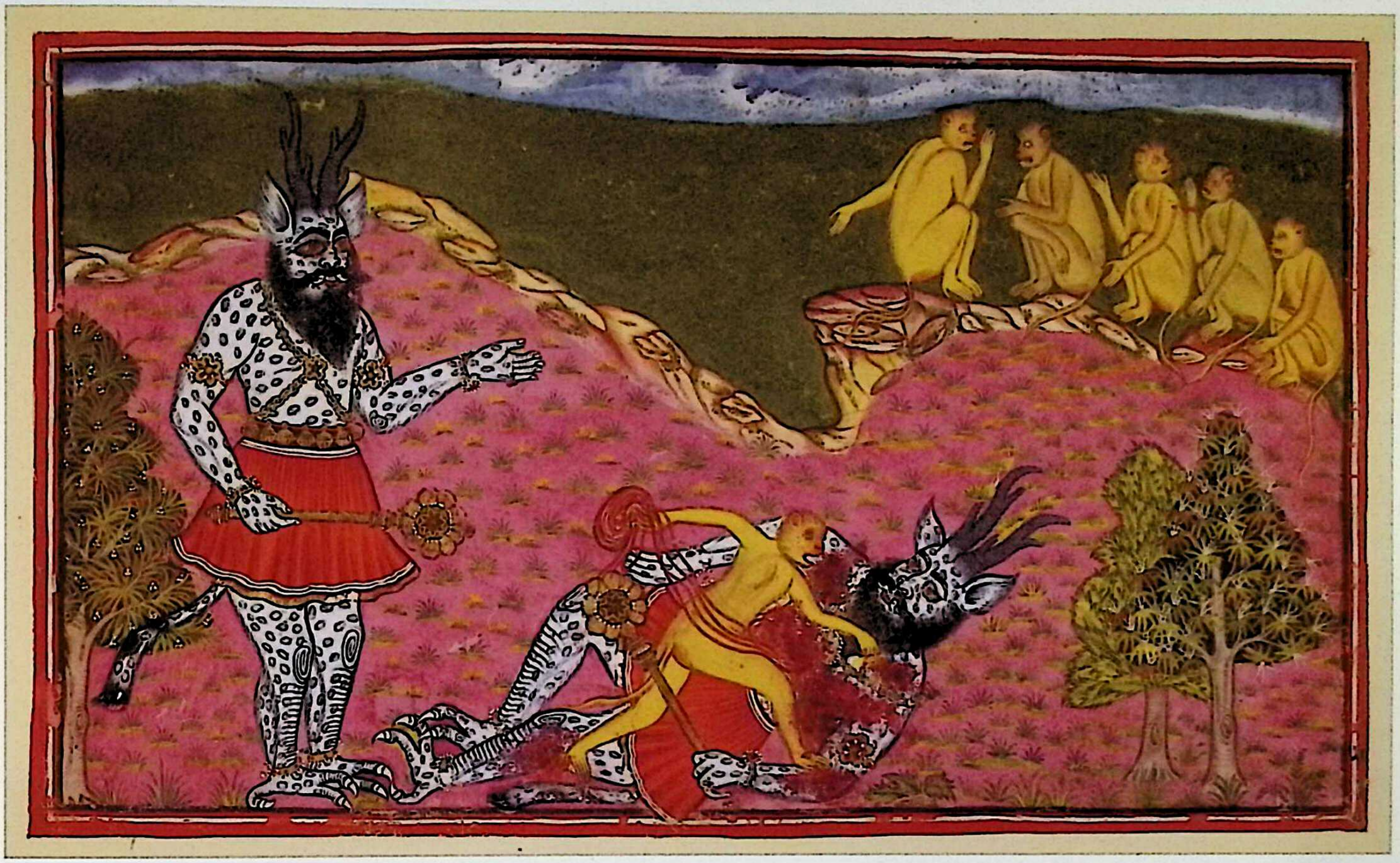
culture. To these two groups was added a third important presence in the Deccani courts—African elites, mostly warriors from today's Ethiopia, some of whom famously rose to become generals and prime ministers of the sultanates that they served.[3] The three factions of the local Dakkhanis, the West/Central Asian Gharbians and the African Habshis maintained a shifting balance in these kingdoms. Tense as court politics may have been, this made the Deccan a place where peoples and cultures met and mingled, and from the earliest times, the Deccan fostered a remarkable cosmopolitanism. Cultures, languages, tongues, faiths and populations: all were profoundly mixed in the Deccan.

We see something of this multicultural world in figure 2, a 17th-century kalamkari coverlet, that shows a picnic in a garden. A young couple embraces in the foreground while several others sit on carpets, drinking wine and eating fruit from vessels that are recognizably Chinese and Persian in design. The people too seem from their costumes to be drawn from Iran, Central Asia and Arab lands. In a charming detail on the left, one of the drinkers gazes at the pineapple he holds in his hand. This New World fruit would only recently have arrived on the Deccan's shores and the young man is perhaps wondering at the contradiction between its spiky exterior and luscious and fragrant interior.

Curiously, while the Deccani sultanates were connected with overseas territories, they had much less to do with the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. Relations with the north were almost always tense and overland trade was mostly embargoed. After all, the first Deccani sultanate had come into being when a governor had broken away from the hegemony of the Delhi Sultanate in the 14th century; later sultanates were usually in conflict with, and eventually overrun by, the Mughal empire. As kingdoms battled, borders shifted, forts were attacked, places of worship and royal palaces were razed to the ground and libraries looted or set on fire. What survives allows us to reconstruct only a fragmentary record of what might have been made in the Deccan. Even in what remains, it is not always easy to put one's finger on what is "Deccani" in Deccani art. As a place of such great cultural intermixing, and as a centre of production whose artists could so successfully adapt their skills to the tastes of diverse markets, the Deccan produced a prodigious amount of artworks that were not easily identified as being Deccani. When the great Golconda workshops produced painted textiles for different export markets, for instance, only the technique remained the same; motifs were so thoroughly suited to the buyers' taste and tradition that it is hard to identify the kalamkari textiles sent to Japan/Thailand (figure 3) and to Europe (figure 1) as having come from the same place.

In the art of courtly painting too, the Deccan has had to wait a long while for proper acknowledgement. Deccani manuscripts of the 15th and 16th centuries were often misidentified as Persian ones, while the exquisite paintings from Ahmadnagar, Bijapur or Golconda in the 16th and 17th centuries remained under the shadow of better-known Mughal art. An assessment of the various schools of Deccani painting is still underway, and it is only very recently that scholars have begun to unfold for us the ways in which Deccani art and artists had a pervasive impact upon art at Rajput courts. Many Rajput rulers spent years in the Deccan as Mughal mansabdars participating in the unending campaigns to conquer the southern sultanates. Deccani treasures came into Rajput hands at times via the battlefield. We know that Bikaner rulers took away some of the most exquisite Bijapur paintings after sacking the Bijapuri Adoni fort at the end of the 17th century. But we have only recently begun to realize the role played by Deccani art or artists who might have travelled to the courts of Chamba, Mandi, Kota, Jodhpur or Mewar, where their contribution was profoundly important for the shaping of those workshops.[4] Figure 4, for instance, shows one of the leaves of the famous *Ramayana* produced for Maharana Jagat Singh of Mewar in the middle of the 17th century. With over 450 illustrations this project was executed by several teams of artists, at least one of which was led by an artist who was Deccani. Although this *Ramayana* is usually presented as a quintessentially Mewari work, this leaf that shows the monkey-warrior Angada fighting a demon is in a markedly Deccani idiom. The Persianate rocks, the preference for hot pink and sage green, and the asura modelled upon a Persian div clearly indicate the visual tradition from which this artist came.

Perhaps because of their complex and hybrid nature, for a long while the arts of the Deccan remained understudied. After Stella Kramrisch's *A Survey of Painting in the Deccan* (1937), the first major monograph to study Deccani art was Mark Zebrowski's *Deccani Painting*—published more than forty years later in 1983. Yet, since the 2000s there has been a noticeable uptick in the study of Deccani art. A substantial body of work on Deccani monuments and architecture has now been published by senior scholars such as Richard Eaton, George Michell, Philip B.



4
The monkeys who went south in search of Sita, including Hanuman and Angada, come across a huge asura (demon), blue and scaly, with horns and a mace. Thinking he is Ravana, Angada knocks him to the ground and disembowels him, while the other monkeys watch from the rocks. Mewar *Ramayana*, Udaipur, c. 1653. © The British Library Board, Add. 15296 (2), f. 59r.

Wagoner and Mark Zebrowski;[5] younger scholars such as Deborah Hutton, Keelan Overton, Marika Sardar and Laura Weinstein have produced impressive studies on areas of Deccani painting where sources had seemed forbiddingly rare;[6] survey books on Indian art in the late medieval period began adding the word "Deccan" to their titles; and in 2015, the Metropolitan Museum mounted a major exhibition curated by Navina Haider and Marika Sardar that shifted the ground from which the art of the Deccan would in future be viewed (figure 5).[7]

It is worth asking why there is so much interest in Deccani art today. Not coincidentally, this interest has been kindled in the era of globalization, when different regions of the world have become interconnected and interdependent in an unprecedented way, and people and goods have begun to flow across the world at an accelerated pace. Economic changes have brought gains and losses to different countries, and have catalysed cross-cultural understanding and transregional tensions as well. In this era of encounters, as our understanding of politics and economics recalibrates itself, the discipline of art history too has had to re-examine its premises. From the 18th century till recently, art history's major function was to define the essential characteristics of a place: it suggested that a certain region or era had a discernible nature that was visible in its art. Art became a key to the character of a place and an age: a region might have had its own "classical period", a "golden age" and an "era of decadence", for instance; or a nationality's character might be demonstrated by its art: the lucid rationality of the Italian Renaissance, the pragmatism of the Dutch, or the vivid phantasmagoria of the Orient. This is the art history of the era of the nation-state. It aims to show that there is an internal logic and an inevitability to our political borders because the nation is inhabited by people of a particular cultural character, visible in their art.

In the age of globalization, as national borders became more permeable and power equations more unstable, it was inevitable that this old art history's relevance would ebb and a global art history would take its place. Global art history's first utopian dream was to write a truly global history of art, that would make room for creativity of all places and times, and for beauty of all kinds. This unachievable goal soon gave way to a new focus: rather than the study of all things in the globe, we would study "global things". Instead of canonical objects that enjoyed a settled citizenship in a particular place, the focus would shift to artefacts that, like global migrants, had crossed borders in their own lives. These might be objects made for trade, or treasures that been looted and perhaps altered to fit a new use in their new home. Here the artist's original intention was no more important than the forces and desires that impelled the object's movement, survival and alteration over time. And rather than the "pure" exemplars of a particular style, global art history would be interested in hybrid objects that bore the marks of mixed styles, trade, and even damage and reconstitution.

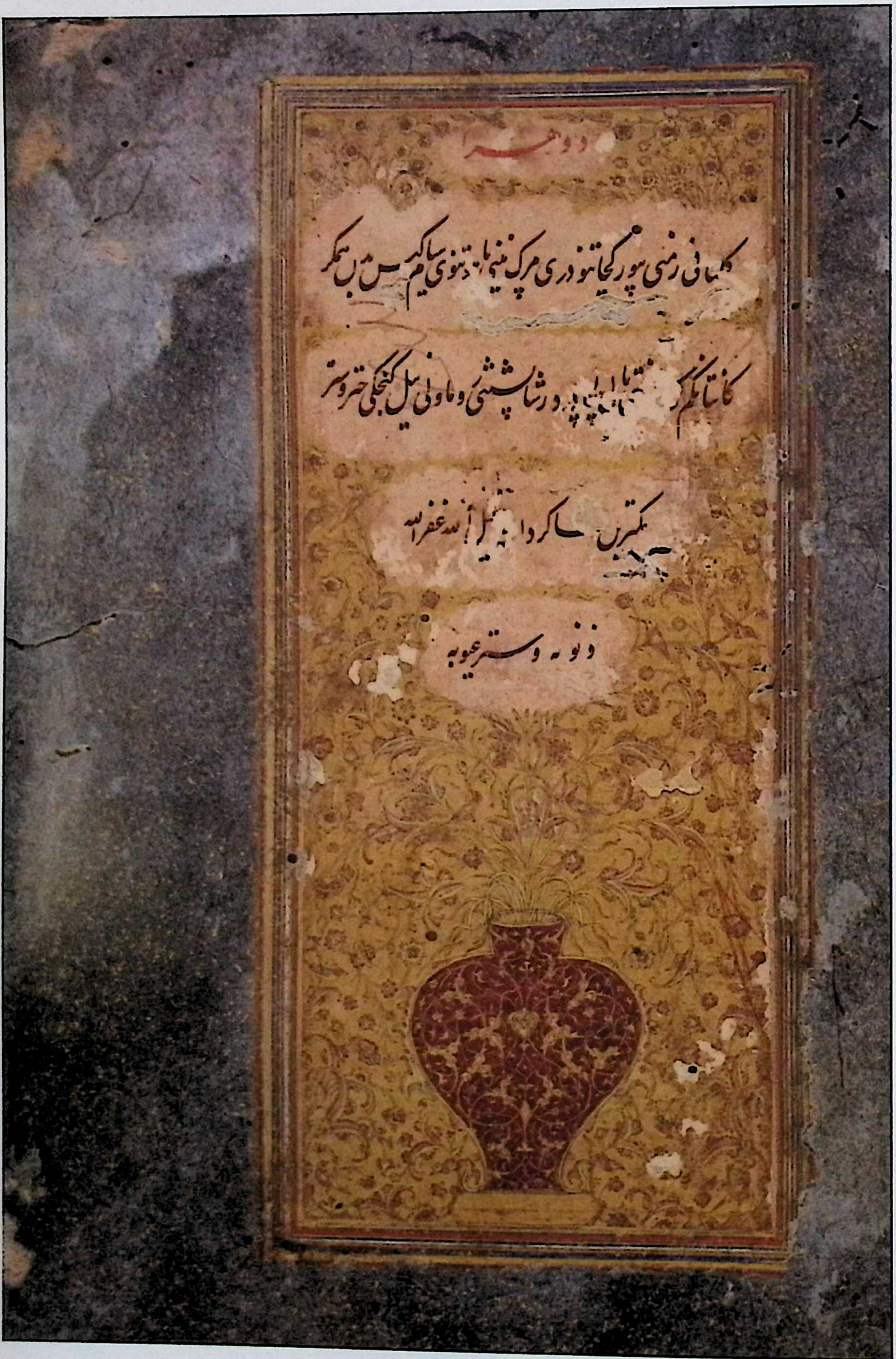
**5**
*Sultans of Deccan India 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy*, exhibition view, April 20–July 26, 2015. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The art of the Deccani sultanates offers rich material for just such an art history. Small wonder that a generation of scholars is now interested in the paintings of the Deccani sultanates that combine elements from Persian, Mughal, European and south Indian styles; or the painted and printed textiles made in Golconda workshops for international trade that adopt European, Persian, Indonesian and Japanese vocabularies with ease; or that senior scholars have produced magisterial books on the way warring dynasties have used the rubble from buildings of their vanquished foes to shore up their own legitimacy.[8] For scholars today, the art of the Deccani sultanates does not just offer beautiful objects to admire, or intriguing questions to investigate. It offers the possibility of pushing the boundaries of the discipline of art history as well.

To celebrate this exciting, dynamic area of scholarship in Indian art, to bring to Indian audiences the work and discoveries of scholars working on Deccani art, and in anticipation of the opening of the *Sultans of Deccan India 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy* at the Metropolitan Museum later in the year, a Delhi-based arts foundation The Aesthetics Project sponsored a symposium on the arts of the Deccan in early 2015. I was asked to curate this two-day event, to which I invited a number of mostly younger scholars doing exciting new research. The Aesthetics Project's founder, Renu Judge, also suggested we do an ancillary event by mounting an exhibition of Deccani objects in the National Museum. With the generous sponsorship of The Aesthetics Project, and the wholehearted support of the National Museum, then led by its visionary director Venu Venugopalan, the exhibition's lead curator Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami and I plunged into the project. *Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan* thus became an exhibition, a symposium and a catalogue—an event much larger than we had originally anticipated.

The *Nauras* exhibition was remarkable for revealing unsuspected depth in the National Museum's Deccani collections. One had not expected the National Museum to have much Deccani material of note. Yet as the Keepers explored their collections, out tumbled exquisite kalamkaris, marbled paintings, important manuscripts, spectacular embroideries and elegant bidri ware. The lesson here is that Deccani art may well be lying in wait wherever the curator looks for it, and the corpus of Deccani objects will expand as decades of neglect give way to a quickening interest. Two of the manuscripts shown in the exhibition—an *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* from 16th-century Bijapur-Golconda, and the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* from 18th-century Hyderabad—have become the focus of two chapters in this book. The *Nauras* symposium gave brilliant insights into the new work of many scholars in the area. Several of the papers presented at that symposium have been reworked into the essays presented in this volume.

Our symposium took the name "Nauras" from the title of the book authored by Ibrahim 'Adil Shah, the sixth 'Adil Shahi ruler of Bijapur (r. 1579–1627). His *Kitab-i Nauras* was a compilation of 59 poems where the word "nauras" was a pun as the word "*nau*" meant both "new" or "nine" (figure 6). With it, Ibrahim was signalling a return to the nine rasas or moods of Sanskrit aesthetics, as well as the arrival of an entirely new rasa in his reign. Although the poems in the *Kitab-i Nauras* are not high literature, they are rhythmic and specify the ragas to which they should be sung. It is



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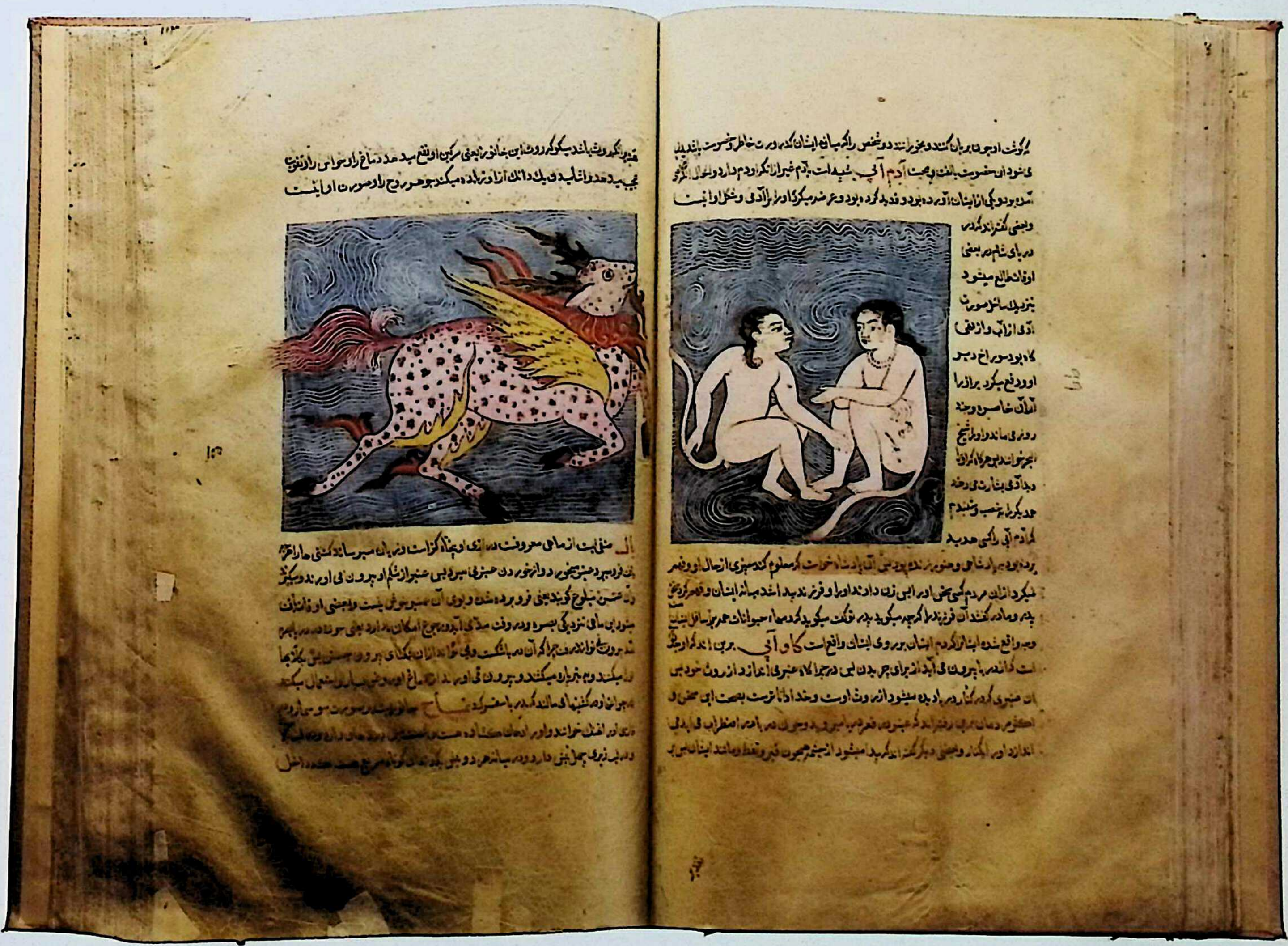
thus a song-book and several contemporaries tell us Ibrahim was a skilled musician: indeed, his portraits show him playing musical instruments. The invocation of nine/new rasas became a leitmotif in Ibrahim's court. The new coin he issued was called the *huna-i-nauras*; his musicians were the *lashkar* (regiment)*-i-nauras;* the new flag he designed was the *alam-i-nauras*; the new festival he decreed was the *Id-i-nauras*; the new capital he built for himself was called Nauraspur, at the centre of which stood his palace, called Nauras Mahal. Inevitably, Ibrahim too was given the sobriquet Nauras Shah. The choice of an aesthetic term for his pseudonym suggests that the arts meant a great deal to Ibrahim; this is borne out by the exquisite quality of Bijapuri paintings from his reign, and his mausoleum the Ibrahim Roza is one of the great buildings of the Deccan.

Several papers in our symposium focused upon this enigmatic monarch and his times. Not all of these presentations could be written up for this book. Had they been there, the book would have focused upon Bijapur in the late 16th/early 17th centuries that has become canonized as the Deccan's "golden age". Instead, this volume has

6
Colophon page from the *Kitab-i Nauras*, Bijapur, 1617. Ink, pigment and gold on paper; 20.6 x 11 cm. Collection of National Museum, New Delhi. Acc. no. 69.22-1.

7
Pages from an *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* manuscript, Bijapur, 1569–70. Ink and opaque watercolour on paper; 38.6 x 24 cm. Collection of National Museum, New Delhi. Acc. no. 58.48.

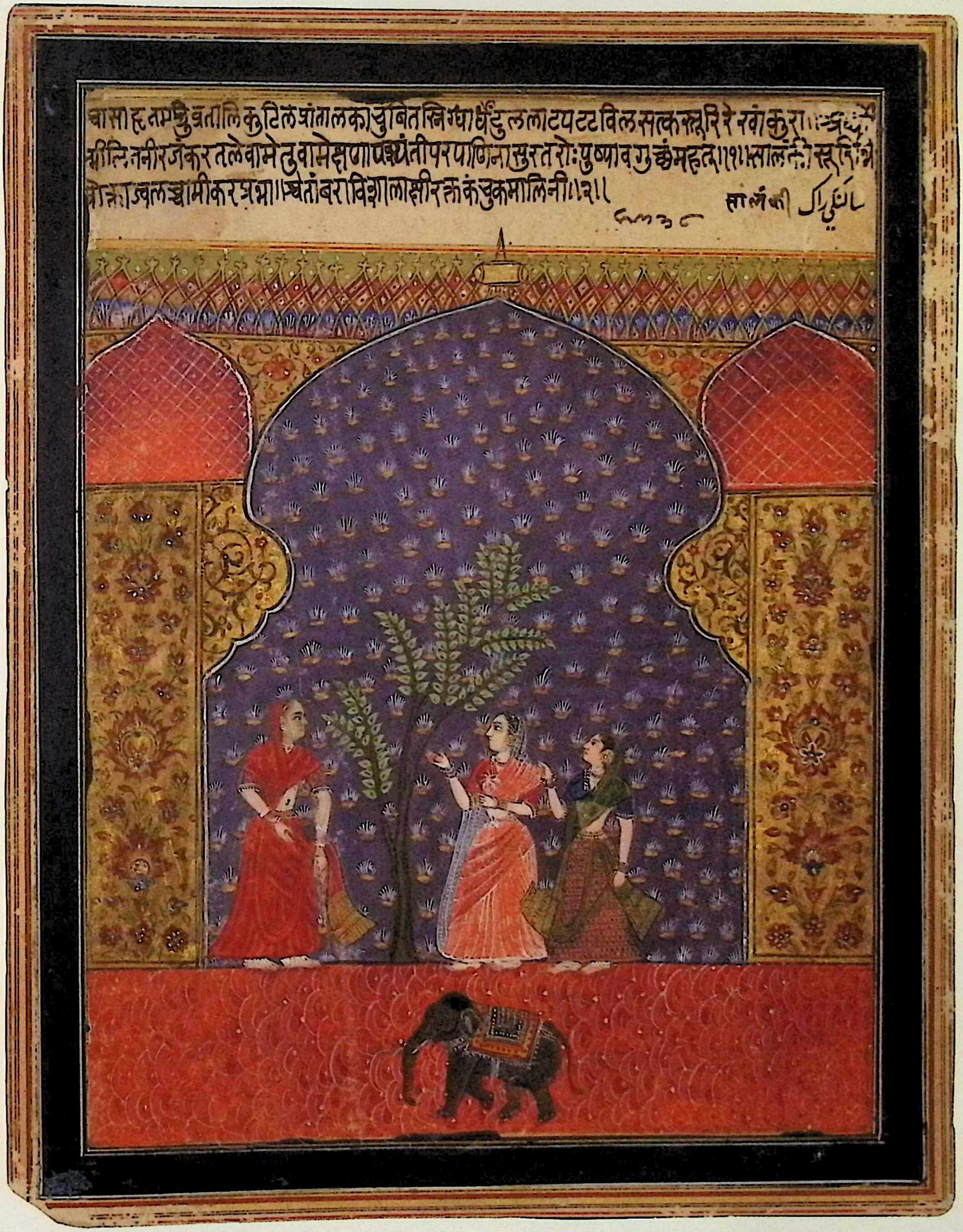


organically moved to take up other important themes. In the space that is left to me in this brief introduction, I will survey only three of these.

**Books as Things.** A number of essays in this volume consider paintings and illustrated manuscripts, which have long been the classic objects of Indian art history. Laura Weinstein considers the inscriptions written by Muhammad Qutb Shah, ruler of Golconda, on the flyleaf of his most prized books. Her microscopic examination of the rhetorical choices as well as the orthography and decoration of the words leads suddenly to insights about much larger social facts: a humiliating capitulation to the Mughals, an ambitious project to build a mosque. Srinayani Lankala discusses themes of courtly splendour and celebration in the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, an 18th-century chronicle of Asaf Jah II's reign in Hyderabad that was produced by the polymath Tajalli Ali Shah, who both composed the text and painted the images. She asks us to think about the way text and image worked in concert with each other, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in dissonance, to create a polyphonic experience of reading. Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami's essay delves into a marvellous, profusely illustrated 17th-century National Museum manuscript of *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat*—an encyclopedia of the known and imagined universe—that was made for a Golconda princess who was married to a Bijapur king (figure 7). Even as these essays discuss the illustrations and inscriptions within the books, they think also of the materiality of the book itself: as something made, handled, read or used. They seem to heed Wu Hung's call to consider paintings as not just images but as things. In his famous book *The Double Screen*, Wu had written: "the term 'painting' really means little if an object's physical properties and the way of viewing it are not taken into account… a painting must be understood both as an image-bearing object and as an pictorial image."[9] As Lankala's paper reminds us, these manuscripts whose illustrations we study are, after all, books to be read and savoured, and she shows us how the image and text must be read together, to understand what the total ensemble communicates.

**Wonder.** Unexpectedly, the theme of wonder recurs across several essays in this volume. The strange, the miraculous, the unimaginable and the alluring all are subsumed under the Arabic term "'aja'ib" which is paired with "ghara'ib" or foreign and exotic—the origin of the term *ajib-o-gharib* used still in Urdu to describe incredible things. The *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* discussed by Ramaswami was a book that dealt in wonders and miraculous things, but there is much that is wondrous also in the books discussed by Katherine Schofield. A historical musicologist, Schofield discusses two early Bijapuri manuscripts—the *Javahir al-Musiqat* and the *Nujum al-'Ulum* that explore the magical powers of music and sound. Harnessed correctly, a musical note can be used to summon supernatural forces, or perhaps to mend a broken heart. Sylvia Houghteling's essay uses the framework of 'aja'ib and wonder to bring new insight to the familiar and celebrated Tree-of-Life kalamkaris that were exported to Europe in the 17th century. The fantastical plants that bear dozens of different kinds of leaves and flowers are painstakingly rendered and yet entirely imaginary. Houghteling connects them to myths, fantasies and grotesqueries from many cultures—meaning that these objects were as exotic to the artisans who made them, as to the customers

**8**
"Solanki Raga", folio from a Ragamala, Deccan, probably Ahmadnagar, c. 1590. Ink and opaque watercolour on paper; 27.8 x 22.3 cm. Rogers Fund, 1972. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Acc. no. 1972.285.1.


चासो हृत नमस्तुवताल्लि कुटिलशांतालका चुंबित स्निग्धार्धेंदु ललाटपट्ट विलसत्कस्तूरिरेखांकुरा ॥ अर्धो
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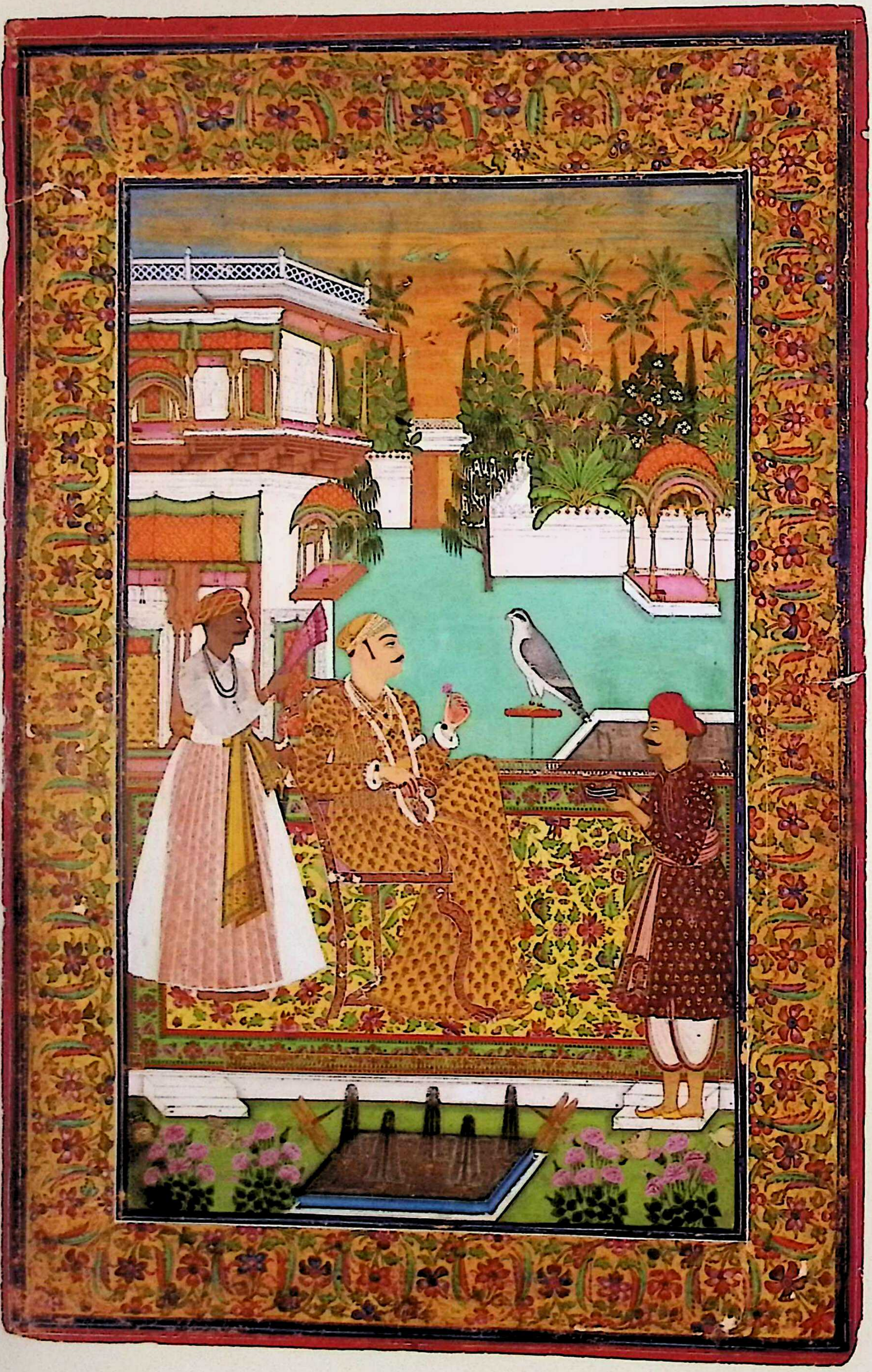

who spread them in their homes. Emma Flatt analyses the use of the word "ajab" to describe strange and exotic perfumes. In all of these instances, the wondrous or 'aja'ib is not simply the incomprehensible. Rather, as Flatt says, the interest in the exotic and the strange has a deep significance. The currency of 'aja'ib texts in Islamic lands in the 14th and 15th centuries, and the continuing interest in wondrous things in the centuries following, was a natural consequence of expanding travel links and empire-building which led to increasing encounters with the unusual and unknown. The 'aja'ib was an attempt to make sense of these. Rather than being considered a naive and unscientific response to an expanding world, the 'aja'ib should find its rightful place in the intellectual history of the world alongside the place granted to the concept of "curiosities" in the European age of exploration.

**Sensorium.** Finally, it is noteworthy that three of the essays in this volume deal directly with senses other than sight. Katherine Schofield's essay begins with an exploration of the Ragamala, only to take us on a journey that connects medieval theories of medicine and magic, showing how sound, image, music and word were believed to harness the power of the different realms. Emma Flatt's essay is a synaesthetic account of the relationship between smell, sound and sight. She tells us how care was taken to perfume rooms, gardens, bodies and food in order to rebalance the humours and to envelope guests in a "common olfactory identity as well as sharing a bodily, emotional and mental state engendered by the food and perfume they had consumed". And Ali Akbar Husain's essay studies a perfumery text written for Ibrahim 'Adil Shah called—what else but—the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* which lays out complex recipes for perfumes and olfactory mixtures that will create appropriate "aromatic atmospheres" in bedchambers and garden pavilions. Husain's essay invites us to look at garden pavilions not just as visually pleasing rooms, but as architectural spaces designed to gather and diffuse scents; the olfactory experience worked in tandem with sights, sounds, textures and tastes to create a zone of multisensory pleasure. Read in the context of these essays, the bidriwork objects discussed by Jagdish Mittal cannot but evoke taste, touch and smell—the intoxicating fumes emerging from a huqqa made more potent by the poppies etched onto its base, the Quranic inscription on a water-bowl altering the taste of the water it holds.

These essays powerfully remind us that sight is not the only sense, and that historically it may not have been given the primacy it has today. As pioneering scholar of sensory studies Constance Classen points out, in an era before electricity and before good-quality glass was available for windows, people lived in relative darkness, and the other senses, of sound, smell and touch were more important for perception than they are today.[10] Our understanding of aesthetic experience in historic times must be expanded correspondingly, to lead us to a sensate art history that understands how beauty was experienced in realms beyond the visual, and in sensations beyond sight. Here it is worth remembering that many cultures counted much more than five senses; the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* lists eight.[11]

After reading these essays one looks upon paintings like those in figures 8 and 9 in a new way. Figure 8 belongs to perhaps the earliest known Ragamala set made

9
"Ma'ali Mian Saif al-Mulk Being Shown Some Jewels", attributed to Rai Venkatachellam, Hyderabad, c. 1795. Leaf: 37.6 × 25.3 cm; painting: 29 × 17.8 cm. The David Collection, Copenhagen, Inv 14/2015. Photograph: Pernille Klemp.

in the northern Deccan around 1590. While Ragamala paintings usually illustrate a scene whose emotional tenor captures the mood of the raga, this set also includes a bird or an animal at the foot of the page, whose call resembles the dominant note of the raga. In this leaf we see an elephant, an enormous beast who emits a suprisingly plaintive sound. Other leaves from this series feature birds which have different calls. Through these motifs, one is invited to "hear" these paintings as much as one sees them. And one gets a whiff of perfume from figure 9, a late 18th-century depiction of a nobleman on a terrace by the famous Hyderabad artist Rai Venkatachellam. In the light of the essays in this volume what would earlier have appeared to be decorative notes in the painting now begin to suggest olfactory experience. The champa and mango trees in the garden are in full bloom, and sweet-smelling custard apples are ripening on branches. In the foreground, a servant offers a tray of jewels but the nobleman seems more drawn to the rose that he holds in his delicately hennaed hand, while wearing a garland and wristlets of jasmine. In this heady atmosphere of floral and fruity scents, even the flower motifs in the textiles seem to bring not just colour but memories of fragrance to the scene. In this painting so redolent with scent, it is small wonder that the butterflies and dragonflies in the foreground seem to be drunk on perfume as they are ineluctably drawn to the flowers by their sweet scent. This volume shows the way for a sensory turn in Indian art history, where visual objects become crucibles for synaesthetic experiences, as we look upon them with new eyes, or with more than eyes.

**Notes**

1 For an account of the history of Indian dyestuffs and its significance in trade, see Gittinger 1982.

2 Goitein 2011 cited in Wagoner and Weinstein 2017.

3 Robbins and McLeod 2006.

4 Seyller 2012; Welch and Bautze 1997; Skelton 1958; Topsfield 2001.

5 See for instance Eaton and Wagoner 2017.

6 Hutton 2007; Overton 2011; Sardar 2007; Weinstein 2011.

7 The exhibition *Sultans of Deccan India 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy* ran from April 20 to July 26, 2015 and was accompanied by a substantial catalogue.

8 Peck et al. 2013; Eaton and Wagoner 2017.

9 Wu Hung 1996, pp. 10–11.

10 Yerxa 2013.

11 The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* lists eight senses: (1) prana (breathing organ, i.e. nose; also 'breath of life'); (2) speech organ; (3) tongue (taste); (4) eye (colour); (5) ear (sound); (6) mana (thought, mind, inner organ); (7) hands (work); and (8) skin (sense of touch). This is discussed in Elberfeld 2003.

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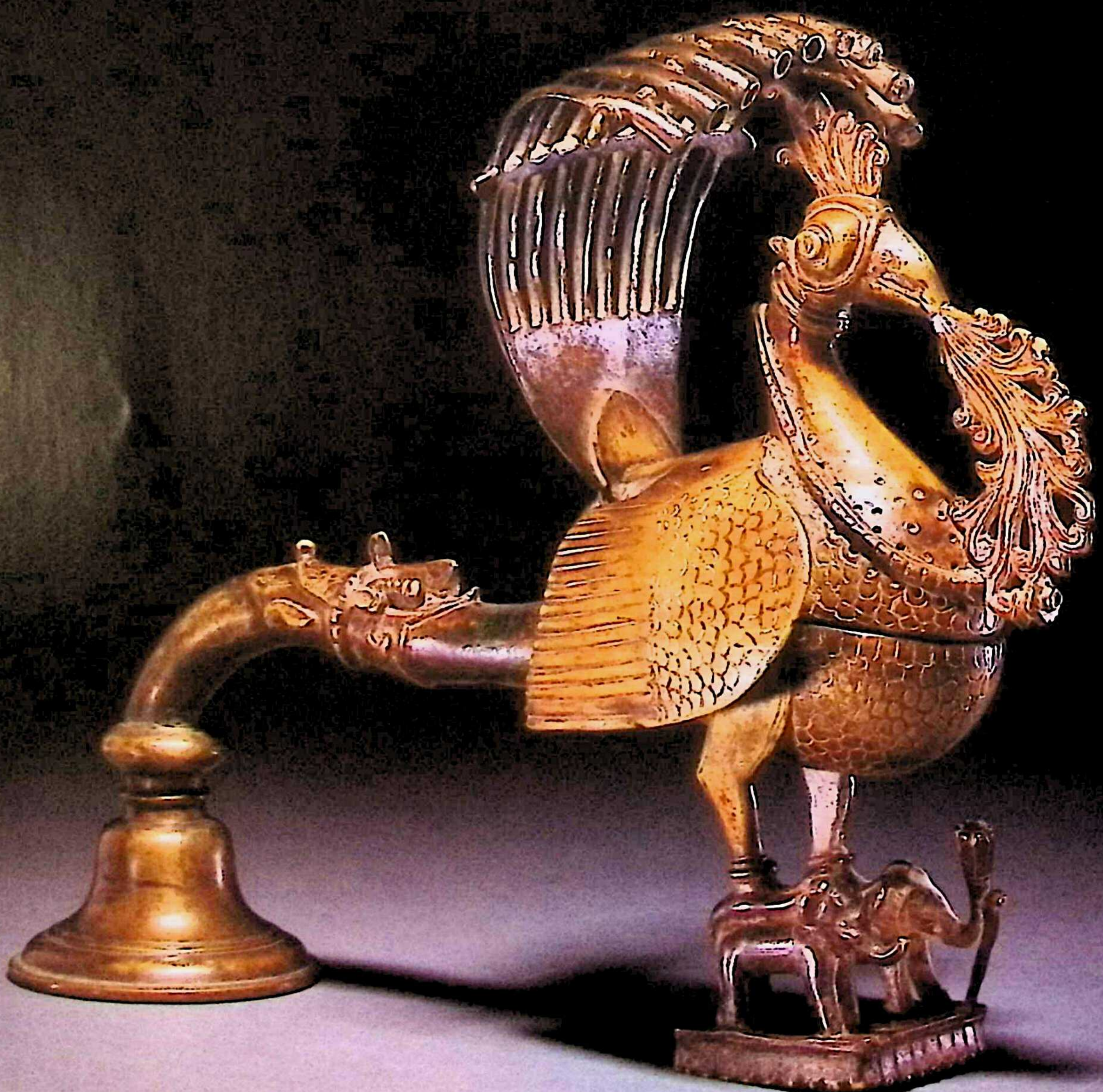


# Social Stimulants
## Perfuming Practices in Sultanate India

### *Emma Flatt*

"It is incumbent that all created beings, particularly the followers of the Prophet, use perfumes and share them with one another."[1] So wrote Nizamuddin Mahmud in the introduction to the '*Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, a treatise on perfumes dedicated to Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II in the early 17th century. Modern observers rarely consider the ubiquity of smells at the courts of sultanate India. If we do spare a thought for the "smellscape" of the past, our imagination, informed by the olfactory hazards of visits to neglected architectural remains now used as de facto public lavatories or by popular histories of Europe that emphasize the stink of the pre-modern past, tends to odour rather than to fragrance.[2] If we think at all about elite environments, we probably instinctively conceive of them as places characterized by the absence of smell—rather like elite or privileged environments today, or at most with a refined, restrained, delicate floral smell—like the lobbies of five-star hotels. And yet, there is ample evidence that these were societies in which a highly refined olfactory culture existed; from technical manuals on perfume-making, to a rich literary vocabulary of olfactory metaphors that surfaces in both poetry and prose; from the frequent presence in miniature paintings of sundry vials, flasks and bowls placed before the sultan, to material remains of incense burners, vials, bowls, mortars and pestles, and even the physical remains of a precious compound perfume.[3]

Moreover, as the opening quote suggests, in this society perfumes were not a matter of mere adornment, to be relegated to study by connoisseurs and popular historians, but rather played a crucial transactional role in the networked courtly societies of the day. Nizamuddin Mahmud's injunction to "share perfumes with one another" highlights the social capital of this ephemeral substance and opens the door to a dense semiotic world, where smells, odours and fragrances, alone or in combination, carried cultural meanings beyond their olfactory essence. In this essay I will try to reconstruct the "smellscape" of the sultanate courts of the Deccan by investigating contemporary perfuming practices and the theories behind them, as well as the meanings such practices carried for members of contemporary societies.

1
Bronze incense burner in the shape of a peacock, Deccan or South India, 16th century. © The Trustees of The British Museum.

## Perfuming the Palace: The Audience Hall and the Bedroom

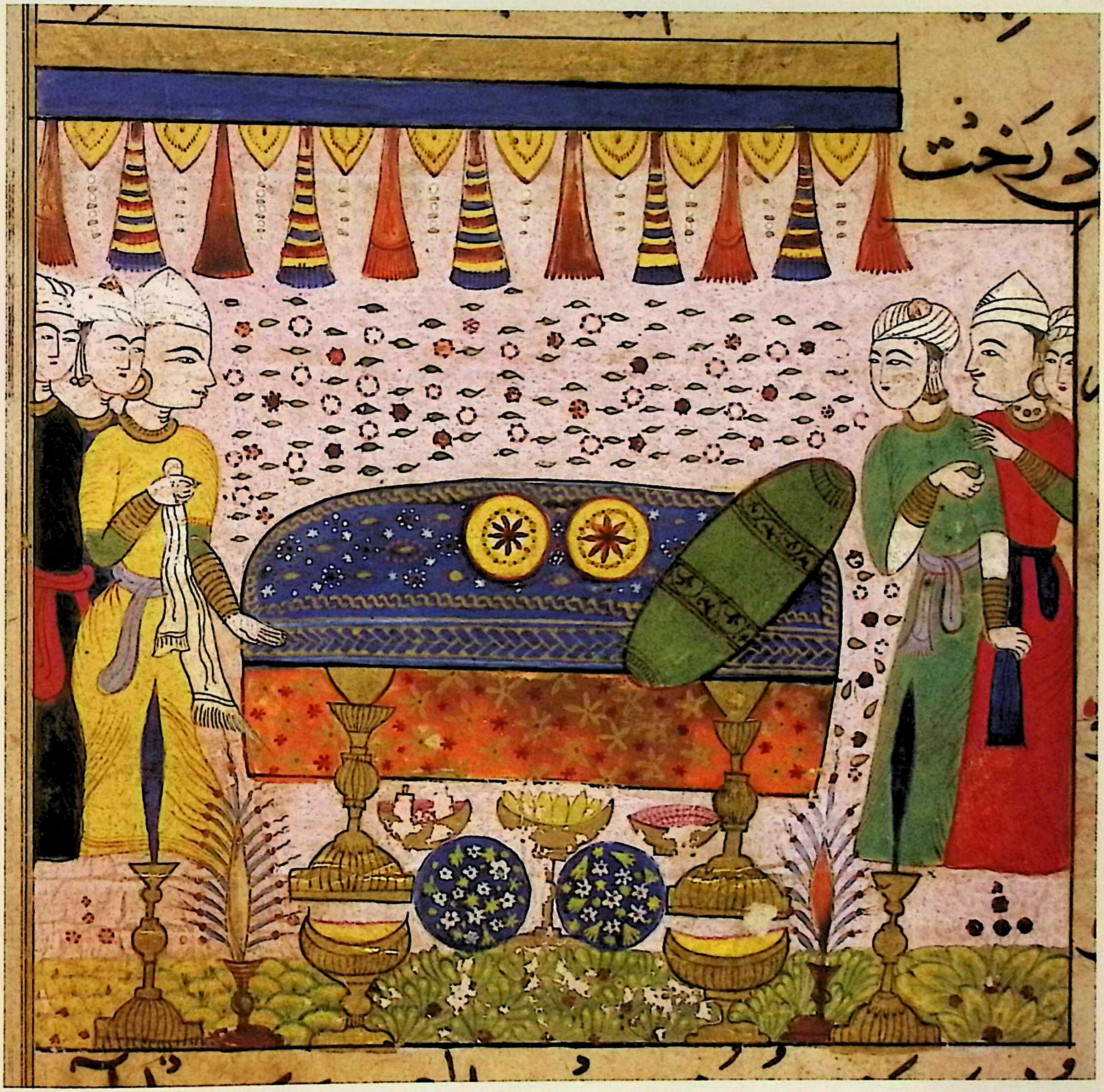
Visitors to sultanate courts were immediately assaulted with an overwhelming panoply of smells. The 16th-century Portuguese physician Garcia Da Orta, who spent time in Ahmadnagar, described how the floors of Deccan palaces were covered with strong-smelling champa and roses all night and for much of the day.[4] A recipe book from the neighbouring Malwa Sultanate complicates this simple olfactory smellscape by describing how the palace walls should be rubbed with a perfumed paste, known as 'abir, whose smell has first been enhanced by the addition of one or two ingredients:

> [Add] mango, ambergris, beans, marhatti aloes, perfumed fat, bruised grain, chauva,[5] essence of mouse-ear plant, Chinese camphor, boiled juice of spikenard and put in flowers scented with aloes, white sandal essence, scent from shoots, sesame oil scent, sweet basil essence, champa essence, artemesia essence, turmeric leaves essence, sacred basil essence, cardamom juice, sandal juice.[6]

And as if this were not enough olfactory stimulation for the sultans, an illustration of a perfumed palace from the same 15th-century recipe book shows a comfortable throne in the centre of a floor strewn with flowers, while incense and scented candles burn alongside trays of flowers, perfumed paans, bottles and chalices probably holding perfumed waters and unguents (figure 2).

Perfume could create a visual spectacle too. Brass incense burners shaped like stylized peacocks are often dated to 16th-century Deccan (figure 1).[7] Similarly stylized peacocks appear in contemporary Bijapuri architecture, such as the Mehtar Mahal, and in painting, such as the seven-storeyed throne in the Bijapuri astrological encyclopedia, *Nujum al-'Ulum*, whilst in Ali Reza's painting of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II in procession, a tiny peacock incense burner is actually in use (figures 3–5).[8] References to similar zoomorphic incense burners in the 12th-century Chalukyan text, the *Manasollasa*, and the existence of a tradition of zoomorphic incense burners in both Spain and Mesopotamia dating from at least the 11th century, suggest that these Deccani examples were part of a much older tradition that spanned Indic and Islamicate regions.[9] The smoke from the burning incense would have escaped through the little holes in the neck and back of the bird, creating tiny, feathery wisps of grey, or even coloured, smoke, giving the illusion that the bird was actually moving, rather like the marvellous automata—bejewelled trees with singing mechanical birds—that inspired wonder and amazement in textual accounts of medieval Indian courts.[10]

The *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* perfume manual provides further evidence of the overwhelming olfactory environment of sultanate palaces. The manual commences with a list of perfume simples, followed by the humoral characteristics and medicinal benefits of each. However the author makes it clear that it is never adequate to use a single unmodified olfactant for perfuming: every perfuming technique he describes requires a compound perfume, and each compound comprises a combination of both animal and vegetal simples.[11] Moreover, the author continues, even before any of these simples are ready to be used in compounds, they must first undergo some type of preparation, which generally involves mixing, marinating, infusing or cooking the animal or vegetal simple with other olfactants.[12]



2
"Advice on the Domestic Use of Perfume", from the *Ni'matnama* of Ghiyath Shahi, Malwa, c. 1500. © The British Library Board, I.O. Islamic 149, f. 121v.

Next, recipes are given for perfumed pastes, unguents, oils, incenses, candles and water. These preparations are to be rubbed or sprinkled on every available surface (including walls, furniture and textiles) or burnt, in order to cense textiles and to perfume the air. Finally, different techniques are listed for scenting specific rooms. One particular technique is recommended for the bedroom, which includes suspending flowers on ropes and censing them with aloeswood incense, sprinkling the cooled ash from an incense made of camphor and ambergris on the bedsheets, and laying out silver trays filled with flowers and oranges.[13]

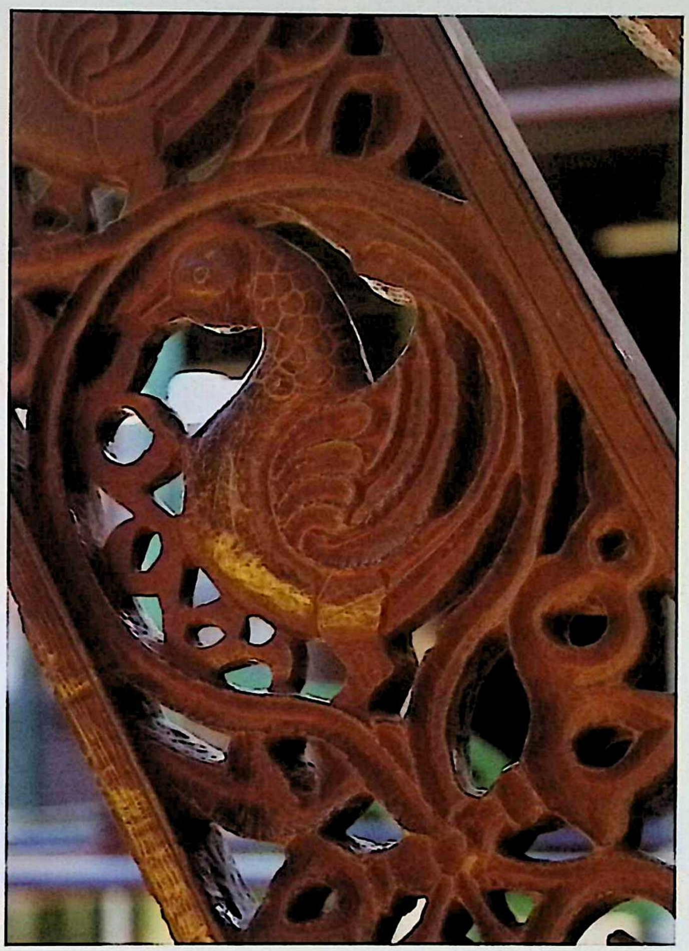
To understand the importance of the olfactory environment of a palace, we need to understand that such adornment was not merely aesthetic in medieval Persianate societies. In both Ayurvedic and Unani medicine, olfactants played as important a part in medical cures as they did in aesthetic regimes.[14] Since Perso-Arabic medical thought was based on the humoral system, the body and everything consumed by the body, including food, drink, perfumes and medicines, were all classified in terms of their humoral properties: cold, hot, dry or wet.[15] The environment a body inhabited was important too, and careful attention was paid to the humoral qualities of the air and climate. Disease was caused by a humoral imbalance and emotions were understood to be caused by particular adjustments in humours, and could thus be manipulated by the application of particular substances with the right humoral characteristics. Perfumes were particularly well placed to do this, for, as the 14th-century Arab physician Ibn Qayyim argued:

> A sweet scent is the nourishment of the spirit and the spirit is the instrument of the faculties and the faculties increase with scent; for it is beneficial for brain and heart and the other internal organs, and makes the heart rejoice, pleases the soul and revitalises the spirit. It is the truest of all for the spirit and the most suitable for it; for there is a close relationship between scent and the good spirit.[16]

As Ali Akbar Husain explains, in contemporary medical theory advanced by figures like Ibn Sina, certain fragrances or exhilarants (mufarrih) were understood to act physiologically upon the heart (dil), causing it to expand, with direct ameliorating consequences for both the emotional state of a person—creating a feeling of joy (farah)—and for their physical health.[17] Smells, particularly good smells, had therefore a transformative effect on humans. We can see how pervasive this attitude was in a description of the Farah Bakhsh Bagh (joy-bestowing garden), written in the medieval Deccani sultanate of Ahmadnagar:

> …the garden and its building was so heart expanding and joy bestowing. (…) The guile of the pictures of Mani found life from the delicacy of its spirit-increasing air (…). The life-prolonging fragrant breeze bestowed equilibrium and the blossom-scented air and the ʿabir scented odour of its lakhlakha is the grief of the pod of Tatari [musk].[18]

Here the garden, like an exhilarant, expands the heart and changes the mood of the visitor, bestowing joy. Since emotions were thought to be caused by particular adjustments in bodily humours, the garden, and by implication its fragrance, is

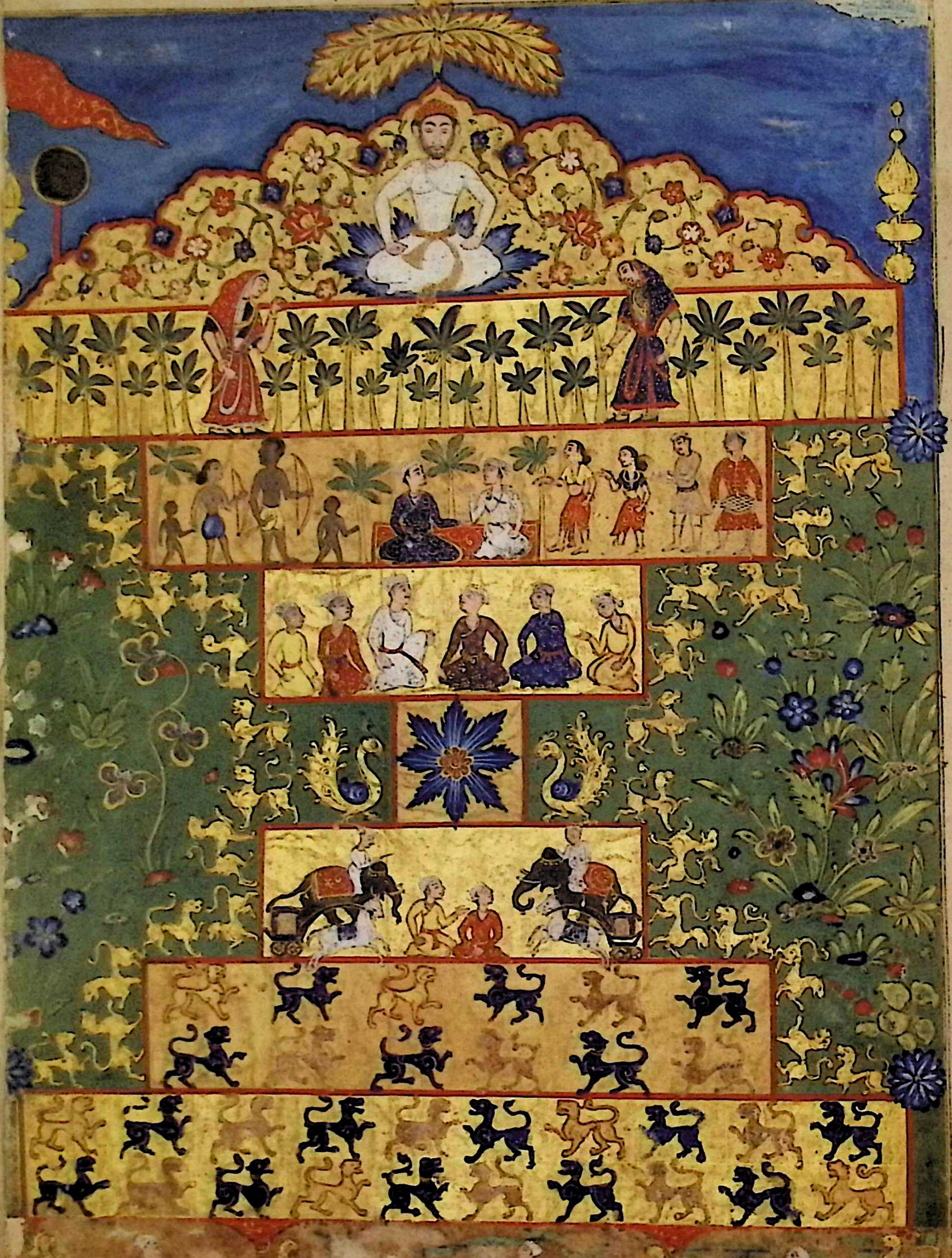


3
Peacock decoration on the Mehtar Mahal, Bijapur, 17th century. Photograph © Dipti Khera.

actually working on the physical body of the visitor. The fragrant garden breeze induces a state of i'tadal or equilibrium, the condition when bodily humours were in perfect balance.

Given this understanding of the transformative powers of smell, it was commonly recognized that certain fragrances could be used in order to manipulate both health and emotive states. According to the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, specific techniques for perfuming the palace could respectively produce joy or seriousness.[19] Another technique is endorsed with the guarantee that it will increase drunkenness and lust, and another is specifically intended for a timid lover: burning a complex incense in the bedroom is said to strengthen one's confidence.[20]

This understanding of the transformative power of smell on emotions might also give us another way to think about the peacock-shaped incense burners. Peacocks were certainly polysemic objects in sultanate India, associated with royalty as well as with religious figures, from Sufis to Sarasvati, the goddess of music and learning who was much praised by Ibrahim 'Adil Shah in his *Kitab-i Nauras*. In Indic poetic traditions, peacocks were also associated with a certain season and emotion: monsoon, which is the season of longing. This connection is seen in various Deccani contexts too. In the 16th-century Ragamala paintings, peacocks signal an impending storm (figure 6).



ودیگر گفت دیگر باید که در وقت ساختن تخت چکرسنت سلاکار اگر این چکر بسـ

They also provide an indication of the note on which the depicted raga should start, since according to the influential Sanskrit treatise on music, the *Sangitaratnakara*, composed in the western Deccan in about 1250 and circulating in an illustrated Deccani version at the 16th-century 'Adil Shahi court, the note Sa (sadja or kharaj), the first and fundamental note of the scale, is the voice of the peacock (figure 7).[21] The Bijapuri astrological encyclopedia, the *Nujum al-'Ulum*, highlights the association of peacocks with longing by providing instructions for making a talisman that restores intimacy to a pair of friends separated by a quarrel. This talisman requires the reader to draw a picture of a peacock on a piece of black silk, cense the silk with incense made of aloes and frankincense and then, at the appropriately auspicious time, to tie it on his arm.[22]

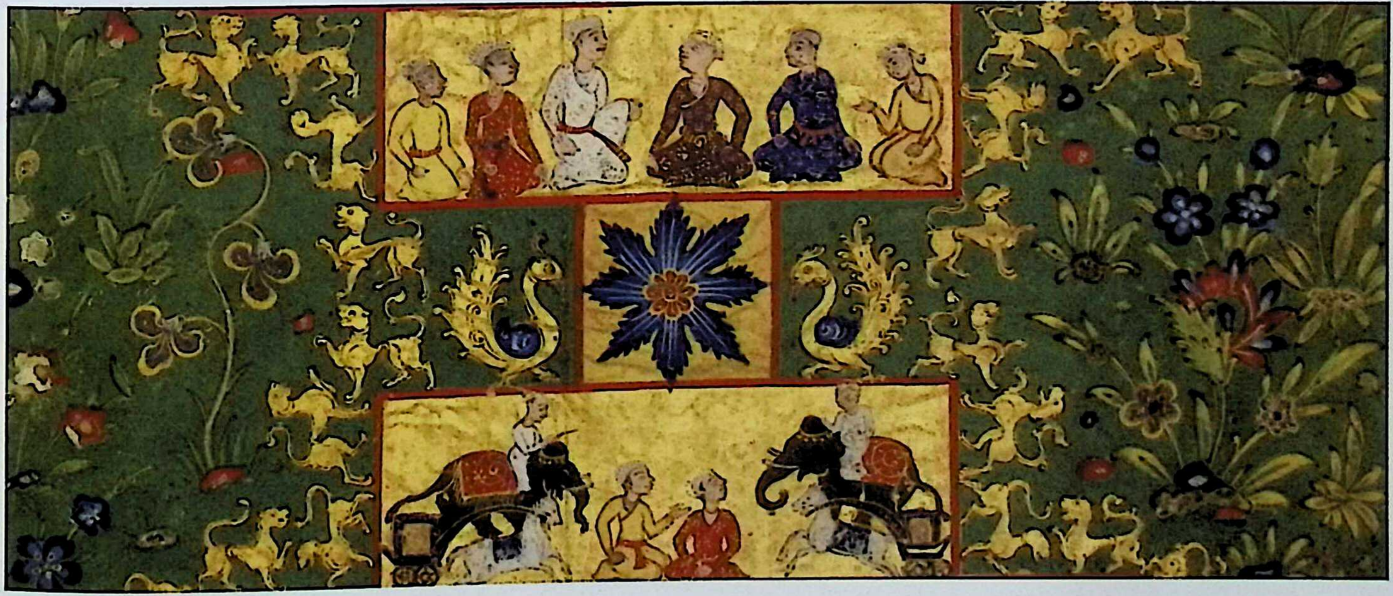
Whilst peacocks are not associated with any particular olfactory characteristics themselves, their association with the monsoons links them to one of the most quintessentially Indian smells: the smell of rain-soaked earth, a smell prized as far back as the *Atharvaveda*. While there is no historic evidence of specific rain-soaked earth-scented incense recipes, it is certain that the incense burned in intimate courtly gatherings on summer nights would have used ingredients understood to have a cooling effect on the courtiers.[23] In this way, these burners contributed to the singing of certain ragas and the admiring of certain Ragamala images to foster, through their form and through their olfactory effect, the emotion of longing in the assembled company, and perhaps even—given the magical powers attributed to ragas—to conjure up the long-awaited rains.[24]

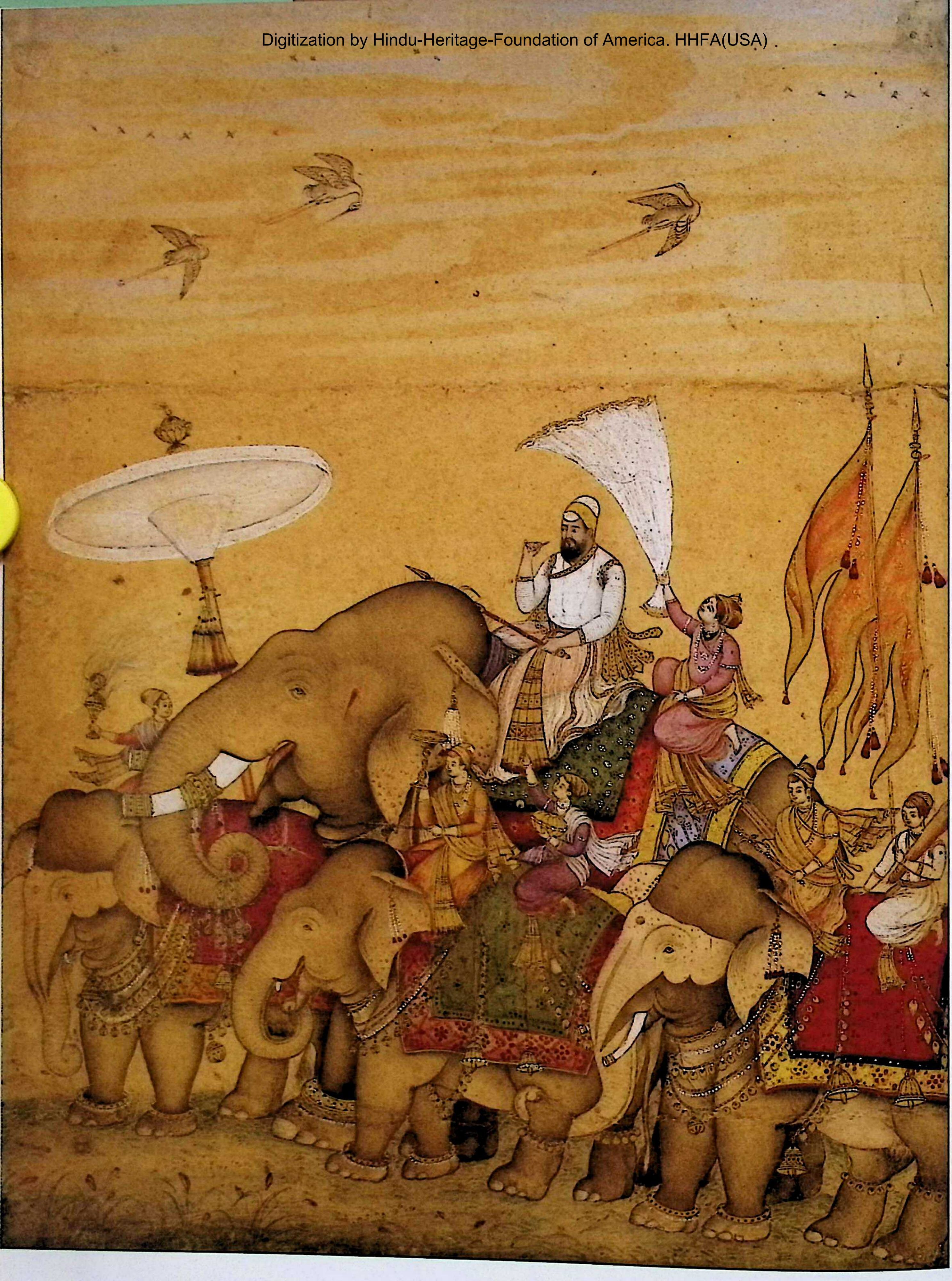
## Perfumed Bodies

Of course buildings and furniture were not the only things that were perfumed. In a royal assembly, as elsewhere at court, the king's nadims or boon companions were expected to perfume their bodies, hair and breath.[25] Recipes abound in contemporary

**4a**
"The Seven-Storeyed Throne" or the "Second Sinhasan Chakram" from the *Nujum al-'Ulum* of 'Ali 'Adil Shah I, Bijapur, 1570. © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, CBL In 02, f. 191r.

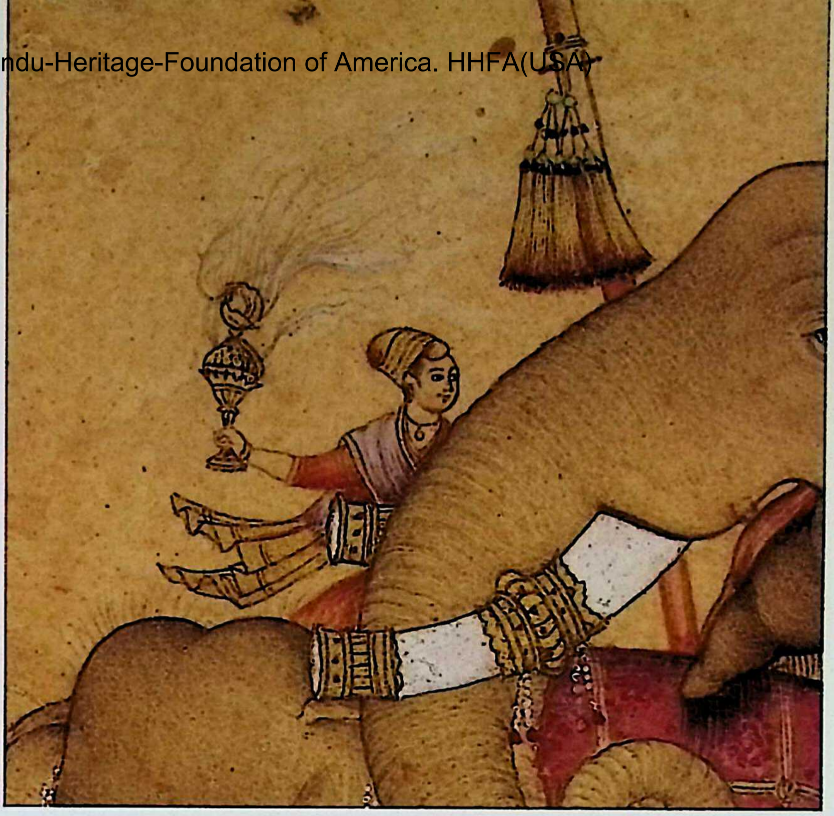
**4b**
Detail of peacocks in figure 4a. © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.





**5a**
"Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II in Procession", also known as "Royal Elephant Procession", Bijapur, 17th century. Gouache on paper. From the collection of Howard Hodgkin. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

**5b**
Detail of peacock incense burner in figure 5a. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



manuals for mouth freshener, perfumed paan, and perfumed cotton buds to be tucked into the outer ear. The *Ni'matnama* gives directions for perfuming a woman's body, which shows how each part of the body was to be subjected to different perfuming techniques to create a highly complex mix of smells:

> Rub perfume separately into each joint. [Use] pellets of perfumed paste. Wash the hands in rosewater. Take the sap from the bark of the mango tree and from the bark of the wild fig tree and from the peepal tree and wash the body [with it]. Rub aromatic paste, perfume and musk into the armpits. Rub *chauva* [paste], rosewater and musk on to the private parts and rub sandal on the throat. Essence of musk is good for the mouth [also] put aloes perfume into the mouth. Rub ointment made from bodily oils on the face, rub rosewater on the forehead, sniff flowers, scatter spikenard on the head, rub saffron on the face, use scented flower oils of every kind, make *'abir* with the sweet scent of jasmine flowers, polish the two front teeth, rub perfume into the handkerchief, wash the whole body with rosewater. Put on a white chador and apply scent to it.[26]

Further chapters in the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* focus on techniques for scenting garments, including sprinkling them with perfumed water, censing them with perfumed smoke, folding them up with a mix of musk and flowers, and so on.

Perfumes were not merely rubbed on the body, but were consumed too, as flavourings added to refreshments provided at courtly gatherings and feasts.[27] Great care was taken by the host's establishment to ensure the foods served were suitable for the season and were balanced according to the Unani alimentary classification of hot, cold, dry and wet. Recipe books like the *Ni'matnama* provided optional variations on a standard recipe to allow the same dish to be served in different weather, or to people of different humoral characteristics.[28] Many of the options involved the addition of olfactory exhilarants such as clove, cardamom, musk, ambergris or saffron, each of which had known physical, emotional and behavioural benefits, including freshening the breath, exhilarating the heart, promoting conversation and increasing lust. The author of the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* recommended the addition of saffron to wine in order to cause "so much intoxication and such extreme joy", although he cautioned that "it sometimes ends in madness".[29] Adding the expensive perfume known as ghaliya to wine was said to accelerate drunkenness, while adding costus would instigate both social and sexual intercourse, and adding wild spikenard would increase lust.[30]

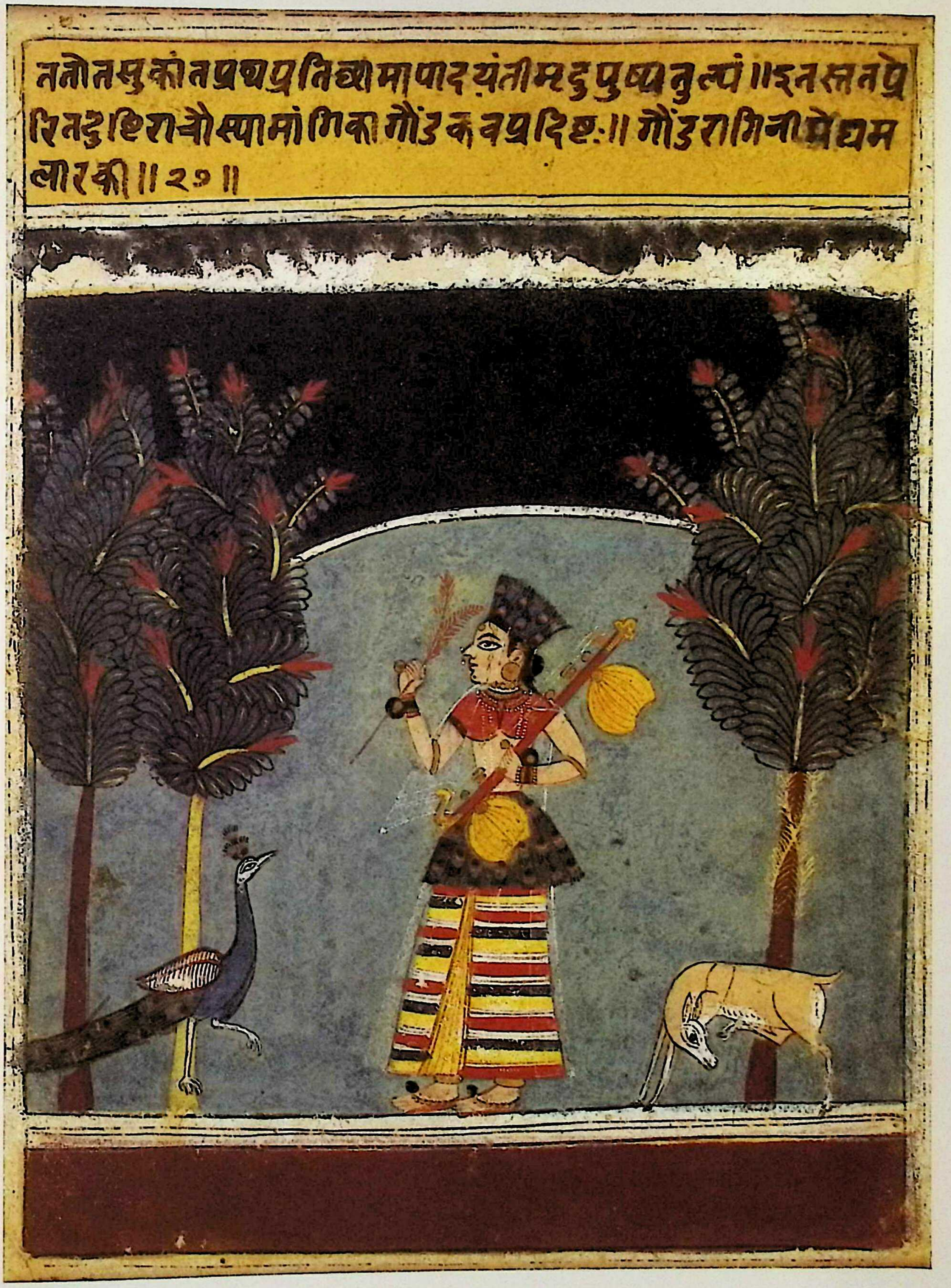
Of course material substances like food, drink and perfumes acted not just to transform the body of individuals, but had a communal aspect too. The implication of Nizamuddin Mahmud's opening injunction in the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, that "it is necessary for all created beings, particularly the followers of the Prophet, to use perfumes and to share them with one another" is that by sharing fragrances and fragrant substances, all humans will be brought closer together—even those who already share a common identity—in this case, religion. Indeed, the entire book can be seen as a way of sharing perfumes with others: through the medium of recipes. As an object, perfume seems to have been frequently gifted, both to individuals and to groups. Advice/normative literature emphasized the importance of ending a communal meal by handing round a bottle of scent from which each guest would perfume himself. The act of sharing the bottle, the substance *and* the action of perfuming with a group of people with whom one had just shared a meal underlines the physical and bodily nature of such transactions of sociability: the guests would now all have a common olfactory identity as well as sharing a bodily, emotional and mental state engendered by the food and perfume they had consumed.

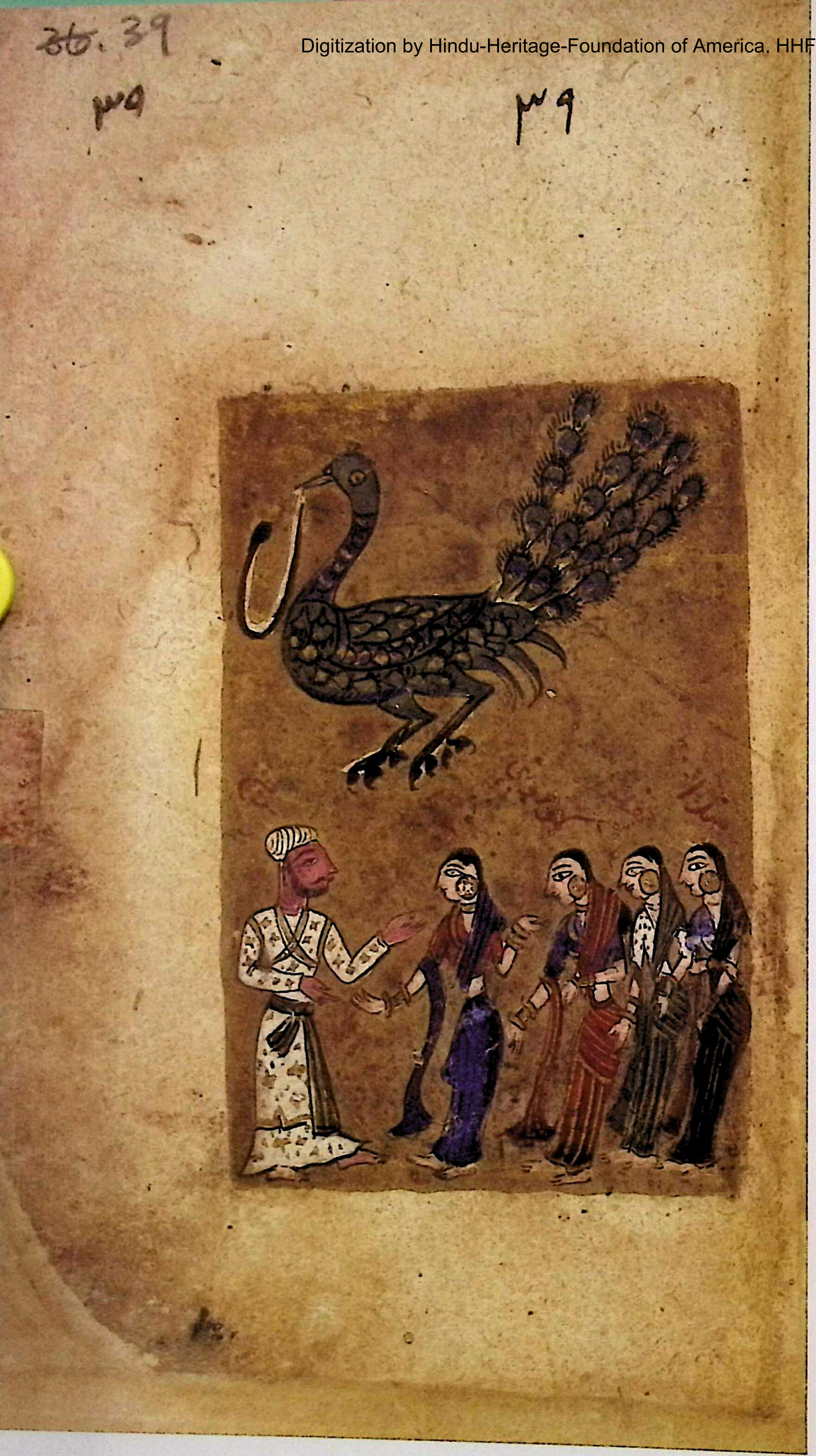
## Foreign Fragrances

Perfume-making manuals were of course elite courtly manuscripts, intended for the use of the sultan and his circle of courtiers. South Asian courts were centres of conspicuous consumption where the best, the rarest and the most extravagant of luxury items were purchased, displayed and consumed. Many of these commodities, particularly olfactants, were imported through the long-distance trade networks which linked the subcontinent to China, Southeast Asia and West Asia. Even when monopolies were not imposed, the cost of such luxurious items like olfactants effectively restricted their usage to the wealthiest. If we look again at the bewilderingly varied olfactory palette used to perfume a woman's body, or to be rubbed onto a palace wall, this extravagant simultaneous use of multiple luxurious olfactants in the recipes discussed earlier therefore clearly demonstrated an individual's wealth and standing, and can be read as a kind of advertisement or boast.

Of course, for such boasts to be understood, a particularly sophisticated knowledge of perfumes must have been present in Deccani court society; one in which both the origins of particular perfumes and the techniques of perfume-making were well known. Of this there is certainly some evidence: perfume manuals often include surprisingly detailed discussions about the origins of simples, the specific characteristics of different varieties, and the appropriate uses for the variant types. Thus, after detailing the various theories about the origin of musk, the *'Itrya-i Nauras*

**6**
"Gauri Ragini", Rajasthan or Malwa style, 1640. © The Trustees of The British Museum.


ततो तसु कांतप्रथप्रतिज्ञामापादयंती मृदु पुष्पतुल्पं ॥इनस्तनप्र
रितद्गुह्रिशचौस्पामांगिका गौंड कवप्रदिष्टः॥ गौंडरागिनी मेघम
लारकी ॥२१॥



7
"The First Note of the Scale, Sa (sadj)", from the *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, a 17th-century manuscript dedicated to Muhammad 'Adil Shah, including illustrations from a Deccani translation of the Sanskrit *Sangitaratnakara*, made in Bijapur, c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 39r.

*Shahi* tells us:

> The best kind of it is that which they bring from China. Its skin is extremely thin and its navel will not be more or less than 20 dirams or 21 dirams [in weight] and its smell is extremely pungent. And one *tank*[31] of this musk does the work (of) four *tank* of Tibetan musk and in compounds its smell remains for four years. And after this is Tibetan (*Tibeti*) musk, its navel is small, of not more or less than seven and a half to 12 and a half dirams, and in the skin of this pod there are hairs, and its musk is sometimes yellow coloured and sometimes blackish...[32]

The text goes on to list, in descending order of quality, another six types of musk: Tusi, Tibetali, Khatai, Tatari, Bahri and Kashmiri musk.

What is interesting is the extent to which such detailed technical knowledge permeated literary metaphors. Another look at the description of the Farah Bakhsh garden in 16th-century Ahmadnagar, discussed above, reveals that the chronicler had a detailed understanding of the specific techniques of perfume-making and their diverse effects. Both ʿabir and lakhlakha are names for particular compounds of perfumes, which are made according to different processes and produce a different finished product; in the case of ʿabir, a tablet, and in the case of lakhlakha, an unguent.[33] Both perfumes were understood to have beneficial healing properties that were appropriate to different parts of the body: ʿabir was understood to give strength to the heart, and lakhlakha particularly to the head.[34] So in the above extract, the air of Farah Bakhsh is said to be better than either ʿabir or lakhlakha because it combines the humoral properties, fragrances and healing effects of both compounds.

Moreover, a key ingredient in both compounds is musk. At first reading, the choice to specify the musk in this metaphorical description of a garden as Tatari, one of the lesser varieties, rather than the best sort—Chinese musk—seems peculiar, but a closer reading of the perfume manual clarifies the issue.

> And after this [in quality] is Tatari musk, its pod is two to four dirams. They use this sort of musk in compounds and they say that this musk is not free from damage.[35]

Tatari musk is the appropriate metaphor rather than the more expensive Chinese musk because the author is describing compound perfumes. Such metaphorical precision demonstrates the depth of familiarity that this chronicler had—and expected his readers to have—with the processes of perfume-making, and is also what makes his prose an example of skilful courtly praise rather than mere obsequious flattery.

From at least the 15th century, the courtly societies of the Deccani sultanates comprised networks of courtiers of a wide variety of ethnicities—Indians, Iranians, Iraqis, Turanians, Central Asians, Arabs and Abyssinians—and were frequently destabilized by factional conflicts between groups which coalesced around charismatic figures, often, though not always, on the basis of ethnic origin. In this fragmented and fluid situation, distinguishing oneself amongst one's peers was vital in order to succeed at court. Unsurprisingly, perfumes became a tool through the use of which an individual could stand out from his peers.

If we consider the extravagant simultaneous use of perfumes as an olfactory boast of an individual's status, the highly perfumed woman's body described above raises interesting questions about women and commodities.[36] This is particularly so in the case of slave women, who were themselves purchased and displayed as exotic commodities. Questions arise about women's access to such exotic olfactants, as well as questions about the intended inhaler of her smell. Was a perfumed woman advertising her own independent sources of wealth? Or, as a new or prospective bride, the wealth of her natal family? Or even, as the wife of a nobleman visiting the sultan's harem, was she advertising the power and status of her husband—a subtle olfactory message that might have been passed on to the sultan? Several hadiths declared that women's perfumes should be visible but their fragrance should be hidden, whereas men's perfumes were to be invisible but with an apparent fragrance.[37] Some legal scholars specified that women's perfumes should only lack fragrance in public; in private she should be as fragrant as her husband wished. In normative literature, therefore, a woman's pleasant smell was not only an indication of her wealth and status, but also tantamount to an invitation to intimacy.

We also get a sense of how perfumes distinguished an individual through a brief but recurring series of comments following particularly complex recipes in the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*: variants on the well-known phrase "*ajib wa gharib khwahad shud* (it will be wonderful and strange)".[38] The best perfume therefore should evoke wonder and novelty but above all, it should also evoke "strangeness"—an unfamiliar fragrance with unrecognizable origins. The desire for unfamiliarity suggests one reason for the heterogeneous olfactory palette blended in these perfume recipes. An application of one fragrant simple was familiar and could easily be recognized by even an untrained nose, whereas these compounds would confound even the connoisseurs, and elevate the user above his courtly peers in both his skill at perfume-blending and his access to costly ingredients.

But why was "strangeness" so prized? The unfamiliar and the exotic have been frequently admired in diverse aesthetic regimes throughout history, and yet this admiration, like the sense of smell itself, should be historicized. For contemporary readers, the word *'ajib* conjured up a particular genre of texts known as 'aja'ib wa makhluqat (wonders and marvels), books which aimed to inspire wonder about creation, in order to lead the reader to contemplation of the power and magnificence of the Creator. In a recent intervention Persis Berlekamp suggests that by the late 14th century a shift in emphasis had taken place in works in this genre, moving from the original focus on the brilliance of the cosmic power, to a new focus on the active role of humans in their relationship with the natural world, especially in their ability to manipulate that world through the inclusion of talismans, spells and so on.[39] Thus, the choice to describe complex compounds of animal, plant and mineral origin as "strange" or "marvellous" thus takes on a more philosophical meaning, suggesting the potential of humans to manipulate the natural world through their blending of marvellous perfumes and by analogy, their ability to manipulate the cosmic order, to their own advantage.

The word gharib, which I have translated thus far as strange, but which can also mean foreign, had a specific local significance. In the medieval Deccani sultanates, where factional strife often mapped onto ethnic identity, gharibi or foreignness had a particular political valence. Gharibi was commonly used by contemporaries in both Ahmadnagar and Bijapur (and applied retrospectively to histories of their Bahmani predecessors) to refer to the political factions largely made up of immigrants from the Persian Gulf who were frequently engaged in violent strife with the rival Deccani factions. Is the author trying to advocate his recipes on the basis of their ability to make you smell like a member of a particular faction? This may be too simplistic an assumption: the book's patron, Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II, was renowned for prizing the local Indian cultural environment above Persianate culture. On the other hand, like most of his predecessors and contemporaries, Ibrahim never clearly aligned himself with just the Deccani faction at court; indeed he spent much of the early years of his reign trying to wrest back control from a series of regents—many of whom were Africans—who were generally associated with the Deccani factions. Moreover, the very title of the book, *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi,* and its form: 18 chapters divided among 9 discourses, each of which is termed "Nauras", positions the author and his book as active participants in a particular political moment, aligning the author and his book with the widespread courtly fascination with the idea of "Nauras", the nine flavours (Sanskrit: nav rasa) or the new flavour (Persian: nau rasa) of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II's time.[40] Further study of the use of gharibi in contemporary texts is clearly required before firm conclusions can be drawn, yet this term is a useful reminder to consider how factional political conflicts may have spilled over into the realms of aesthetics and material culture.

## Conclusion

I have tried above to reconstruct the olfactory smellscape of the courts of the Deccani sultanates, situating them in the context of the prevalent contemporary understandings of the body and the transformative powers of olfactants. I have suggested that rather than mere frivolous adornment, knowledge of olfactants and familiarity with perfuming practices was an important courtly skill which could be mobilized in various ways in order to accomplish certain strategic goals. Although this essay has merely touched on the surface of past olfactory knowledge and practices, by directing attention to an oft-neglected sense I hope to have added an extra dimension to understandings of art and aesthetics in the Deccan.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the various individuals who have helped me think through some of the arguments in the research project of which this paper forms a part, particularly Kavita Singh and all the organizers of the *Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan* conference (Delhi, January 27–29, 2015) for inviting me and the audience for engaging so fully with my work. I have also benefited greatly from conversations with Dipti Khera, Finbarr Flood, James McHugh and the members of the audience at the Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University where I also presented this research (April 29, 2015).

**Notes**

1 Nizamuddin Mahmud, *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, British Library, Ethé No. 3076, Ms. No. I.O. Islamic 3650, f. 2v.

2 The Oxford University Press children's book series "Smelly Old History" is a good example of this tendency. See Mark S.R. Jenner, "AHR Forum: Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories", *American Historical Review*, 116:2 (2011), pp. 335–51.

3 See the shell-shaped pomander with makara head and birds, thought to have been made in the western Deccan in the 17th century, which contains traces of a red residue, believed to be the remains of an aromatic substance. Catalogue number 187, in Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 315–16.

4 Garcia Da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*, trans. Clements Markham (London: Henry Sotheran and Co, 1913), p. 37.

5 Chauva (or chuva) was a perfumed paste with four crucial ingredients: sandal, agallochum or aloeswood, saffron and musk.

6 *Ni'matnama Manuscript of the Sultans of Mandu: The Sultan's Book of Delights*, trans. and ed. Norah Titley (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), pp. 62–63.

7 These peacock incense burners are discussed in Mark Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India* (London: Alexandria Press in association with Laurence King, 1997), pp. 95–110.

8 I thank Dipti Khera (personal email communication, May 5, 2015) for drawing my attention to the peacock sculptures on the Mehtar Mahal.

9 The section on incense in the *Manasollasa* says: "A bird or animal made of brass or silver, or fashioned from gold, that has holes in it, and that has the form of a box with a lid, with burning charcoal inside, filled with ball [incense], spews forth incense through the holes in the mouth, ears, and other parts: this is the process in the case of ball-incense." Incense Section: Viṃśati 3, Adhyāya 19, *Mānasollāsa*, ed. G.K. Shrigondekar, Vol. II, p. 144. I am grateful to James McHugh for both this translation from the Sanskrit and for pointing out the similarity between these zoomorphic burners and medieval automata.

10 On medieval automata, see Daud Ali, "Bhoja's Mechanical Garden: Translating Wonder Across the Indian Ocean, c. 800–1100", *History of Religions*, 55:4 (May 2016), pp. 460–93.

11 *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 2r, see also discourse 9.

12 Ibid., discourses 4–8.

13 Ibid., chapter 16.

14 On olfactants in Ayurvedic medicine, see James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). On olfactants in Unani medicine, see Ali Akbar Husain, "Exhilarating Fragrances", in *Scent in the Islamic Garden: A Study of Deccani Urdu Literary Sources* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

15 For a study of the humoral characteristics of Hyderabadi food, see Delphine Roger, "The Influence of the Indo-Persian Medical Tradition on Muslim Cookery in Hyderabad, India", in Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, ed., *Confluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 217–36.

16 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Medicine of the Prophet*, trans. Penelope Johnstone, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998), p. 199.

17 The word faraḥ shares an etymological root with the Arabic word mufarriḥ, or exhilarating, a word which, Husain argues, is frequently employed by Ibn Sina to describe "a state of well-being arising from the refreshment of the spirit and the restoration of bodily equilibrium". Husain, *Scent in the Islamic Garden*, p. 131.

18 Sayyid Ali Tabataba'i, *Burhān-i Ma'āsir*, ed. Sayyid Hashimi Faridabadi (Hyderabad: Majlis-i Makhtutat-i Farsiya, 1355/1936), p. 537.

19 *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 39r.

20 Ibid., f. 40v.

21 An illustrated Deccani version of this

Sanskrit treatise seems to have been made for ‘Ali ‘Adil Shah I, in about 1570, and its images reused in a new Persian translation for Muhammad ‘Adil Shah in about 1630, now known as the *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi.* See Katherine Butler Schofield, “Indian Music in the Persian Collections: The *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*”, (Or. 12857), Part 1, October 7, 2014, http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/2014/10/indian-music-in-the-persian-collections-the-javahir-al-musiqat-i-muhammadi-or12857-part-1.html.

22 ‘Ali ‘Adil Shah I, *Nujūm al-‘Ulūm*, Ms. IN2, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, f. 113r.

23 Although today perfumers in the village of Kannauj make perfumes that smell of rain-soaked earth (mitti attar), McHugh argues that this is a more recent development. See Cynthia Barnett, “Making Perfume from the Rain”, *The Atlantic* (April 22, 2015).

24 Katherine Butler Schofield, “Music, Art and Power in ‘Adil Shahi Bijapur, c. 1570–1630”, this volume.

25 Dominic P. Brookshaw, “Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-Gardens: The Context and Setting of the Medieval Majlis”, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 6:2 (2003), p. 208.

26 Titley, *Ni‘matnama*, pp. 64–65.

27 Ibid., p. 77.

28 Titley (ibid.) gives recipes for dishes that expel phlegm, pp. 42–43; and bile, pp. 49–50; as well as lists of foods suitable for winter, summer and for the monsoon, pp. 76–77. Stews, for example, can be eaten during both the monsoon and the winter months, but those served in winter must be “nourishing”. There are also recipes provided for seven different types of samosas.

29 *‘Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 8v.

30 Ibid., ff. 28r–29v, 10r, 11r.

31 One tank corresponds to approximately 2 ounces.

32 *‘Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 4v.

33 Ibid., discourse 4: “On Preparing Amber Scented *‘abīr*”. Although there is no specific chapter dedicated to making lakhlakha, at various points Nizamuddin recommends different techniques for preparing the various simples to be used in lakhlakha, including pounding the amber and melting the camphor. Francis Joseph Steingass defines lakhlakha as “an aromatic unguent; cephalic medicine; species of strong perfume; a censer, a lamp” in *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met with in Persian Literature* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1892), p. 1120.

34 *‘Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, discourse 2, “Description of the Origin and Nature and Elements of Animal Simples; Nauras 1, Musk”.

35 *‘Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 4v.

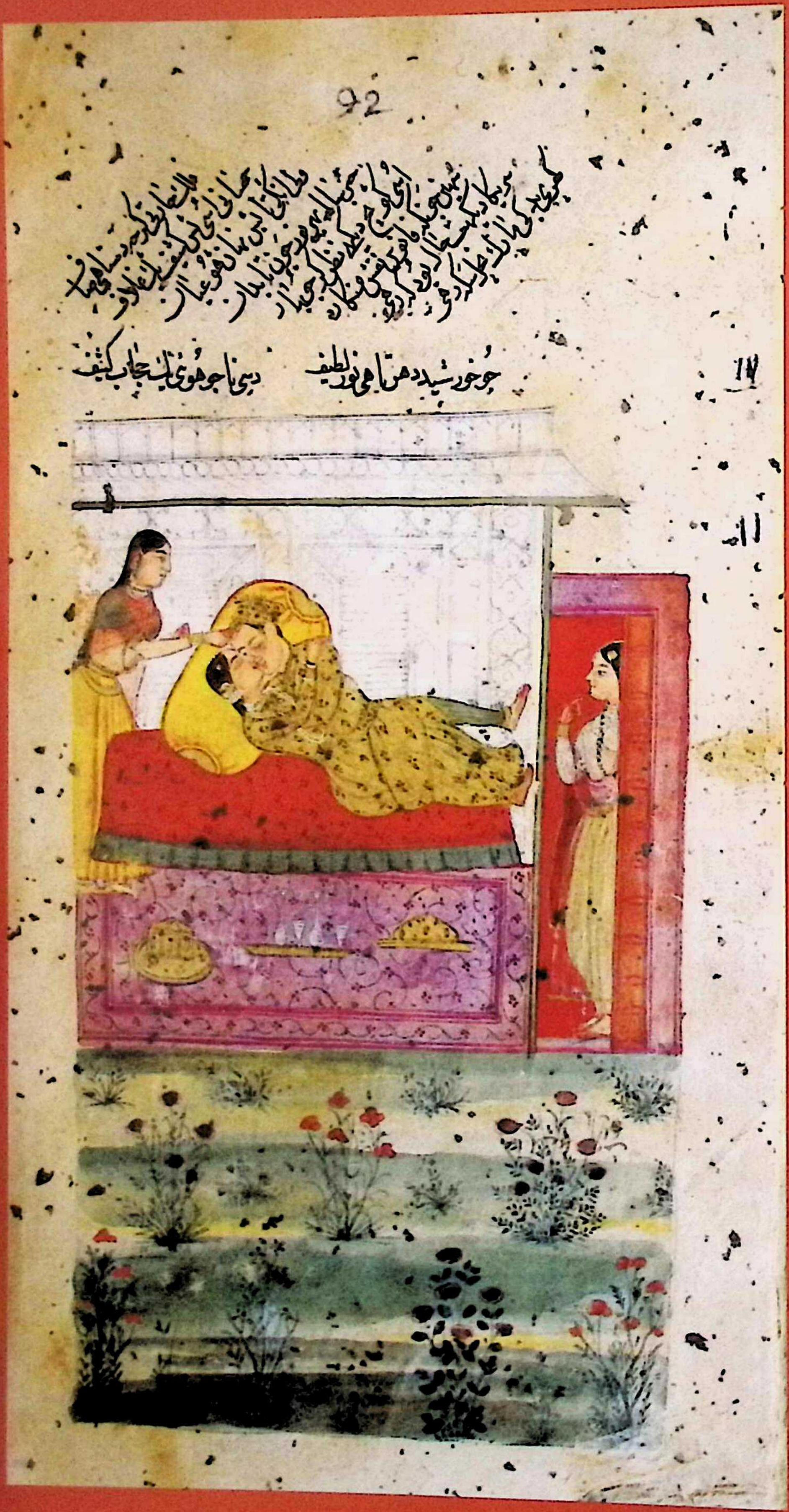
36 I thank Indrani Chatterjee for bringing this point to my attention.

37 Many perfumes came in the form of colourful unguents, and were considered a visible as well as an olfactory bodily adornment.

38 For example, *‘Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, ff. 5v, 12r, 15r, 40v.

39 Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. xi.

40 On Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II’s use of the term Nauras, see Deborah Hutton, *Art of the Court of Bijapur* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).



92

چو خورشید دستا هی نور لطیف          دیپیا جو هوی تا سحاب کثیف

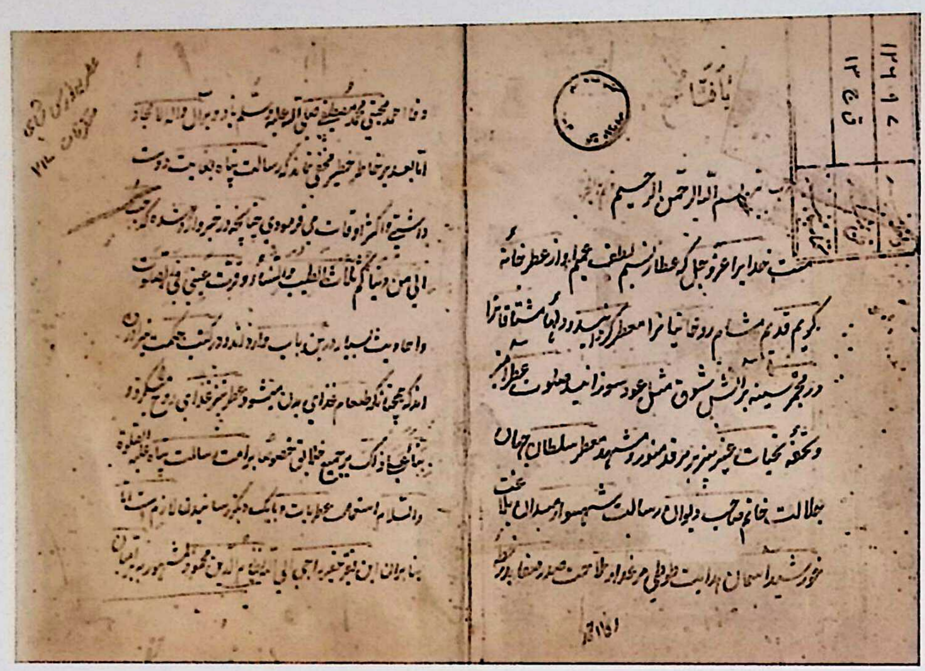
# Perfume and Pleasure in 17th-Century Deccan

### *Ali Akbar Husain*

This essay is concerned with the aesthetic uses of perfume as elicited from a 17th-century perfumery text, the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* (figure 2), written for Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627) at the sultanate of Bijapur in peninsular India.[1] Of the various forms, uses and recipes of perfumes detailed in this text, the listing of methods to scent the royal bedchamber (khwabgah) is of particular interest here. These ideas are akin to the concept of odorizing a work/living space or setting to enhance aesthetics, optimize performance or improve air quality—a concept that has gained popularity in today's "era of perfume dynamics".[2] In many cases, bedchambers overlooked intimate garden spaces within royal palaces in 17th-century India, and some, in the form of pavilions, were incorporated in large pleasure gardens on travel routes. Such pavilions for rest and leisure may well have been placed in garden retreats within and outside the citadel in the Deccan's two principal 17th-century sultanates, Bijapur and Golconda.

The creation of "atmospheres for habitation" in 17th-century Deccan conceivably descended from and perpetuated the earliest Indic traditions concerned with the attainment of sensual pleasure (kama). Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* of the 6th–7th century records some of the practices to enhance kama that were enjoyed by the nagaraka (man-about-town), scents being an essential ingredient of such pleasures. The material culture of aromatics came to be systematically codified for the courtly nobility and the urban elite in the genre of literature which was characterized as kamashastric. Padmasri's *Nagarasarvasvam* (Complete Townsman), which appeared in the 11th century, several centuries after the *Kamasutra*, is one example of this type of text. The *Kamasutra*, together with the *Nagarasarvasvam*, and sections dealing with perfume incorporated in other treatises, apparently influenced the writing of Gangadhara's *Gandhasara*, the only extant work in Sanskrit on the "science of perfumery" (gandhashastra), which has been dated to 1200 CE. However, the art and technology of perfume blending (gandhayukti) was discussed at length in the *Brihat Samhita* (Great Compendium) of Varahamihira, of the 6th century, where the discourse on perfume was located within the framework of erotics.[3]

**1**
*Gulshan-i Ishq* of Mulla Nusrati, f. 46.
Deccan style, 17th century. Scribe: Isharat.
22.2 x 12.7 cm. Salar Jung Museum,
Hyderabad.



2

*'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, f. 1. Courtesy the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, Hyderabad.

The pursuit of pleasure was part of the expression of the power of medieval Deccan's rulers. By the 12th century, writes Daud Ali, the ideal material environment for such enjoyment had been codified in texts such as the *Manasollasa* (The Delight of the Mind), which elaborates the enjoyments of Somesvara III, the Chalukyan ruler of the western Deccan in the first half of the 12th century.[4] Among 20 varieties of "royal enjoyments" the *Manasollasa* elaborates on the "extensive, imaginative and ingenious" applications of incenses (dhupabhoga) with instructions for "aromatizing living room, harems, garments and beds with the help of handled censers of different shapes", as noted by Ramakrishna Vyas.[5]

It was perhaps inevitable that, when the Deccan came to be ruled by the two sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda in the 16th and 17th centuries, the prevailing artistic traditions of the region would be represented at the courts of the sultans. The peace and prosperity that prevailed in the time of Sultan Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II of Bijapur, and the influx of artists from the neighbouring Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara that had been vanquished by the Deccan sultans, have been advanced as reasons for the Bijapur court's patronage of both the Perso-Islamic and Indic traditions, and the expression of a well-marked syncretistic identity of the Bijapur sultanate.[6]

Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II has been described as "a religiously unorthodox and inspired patron of art and music". His world comprised Sarasvati, the goddess of music, and Ganapati, the god of learning, along with Moti Khan, his musical instrument (tanpura), and Atash Khan, his favourite elephant; but singers and dancing girls from various parts of his sultanate occupied an important place at his court too.[7] A poetical work commissioned by Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II, the *Ibrahim Nama*, exemplifies Bijapur's syncretistic culture at the time, and the Indic traditions it incorporated. In this collection of verses recording life at the court, Ibrahim's court poet, Abdul, provides an account of the sultan's participation in the Indic celebration of the advent of spring, Vasantotsava. This, in fact, is a celebration of desire centring on the worship of Kamadeva, the god of love, through rituals involving trees. The poet describes a feast hosted by the sultan for Kamadeva's companion, Vasanta (the personification of spring) in a forest grove which, according to several Sanskrit sources, was the traditional venue for a royal spring celebration.

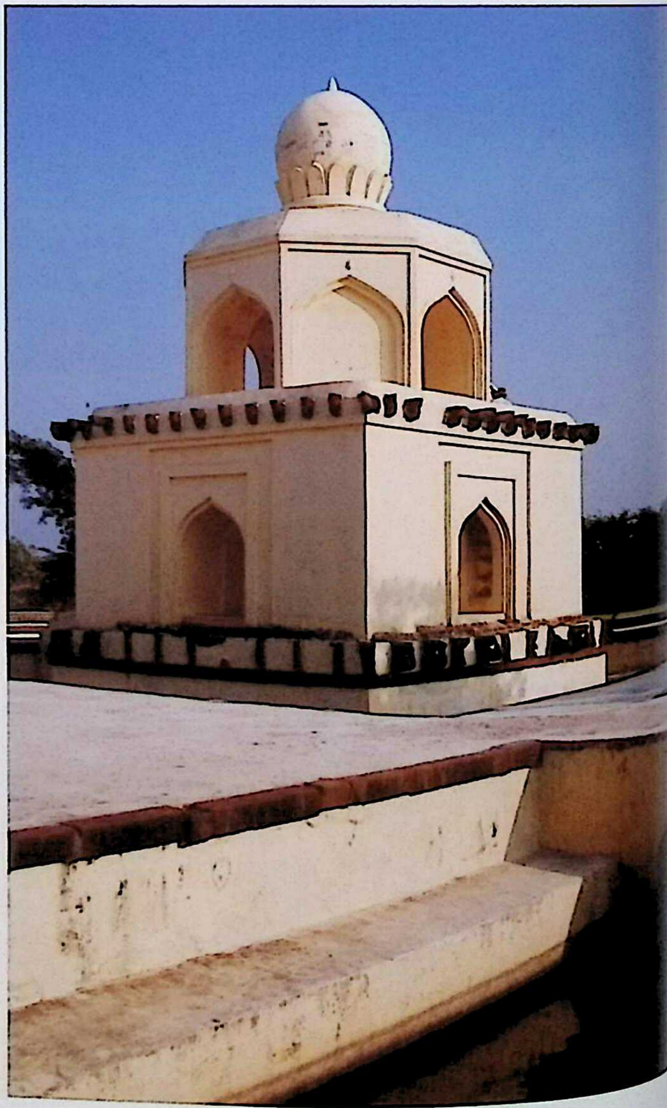
In Abdul's account, Vasanta arrives at the feast hosted in his honour with his army of spring-flowering trees dressed in their finery and redolent with "fifty-two floral fragrances" (bas bavan phulan). Ecstatic at meeting the "Deccan's Shah", the trees sway and bend, nourishing themselves with the basins of perfumed water at their feet, and then gather in rows to present khila't (jewelled robes of honour) to him. Abdul's account is suggestive of a dance ritual, perhaps, that marked the commencement of the spring celebration; it also provides a list of the various tree species, and their arrangement, in the sultan's garden. For an account of a more private enjoyment of Vasantotsava, Abdul shifts the scene to another part of the forest grove. He describes the assembly of the sultan and his ladies at one end of the forest grove, and of Vasanta and his legion of trees at the other end, and points to the similarities between the Shah's royal women in their finery and the blossoming spring trees. Implicit in this account is the merriment of song and dance that would have accompanied such an assembly, redolent with perfume, in the forest grove.[8]

Poetry written at the courts of Deccan's sultans is a good source of information about the various dimensions of odour perception in 16th- and 17th-century Deccan. Deccani poets referred to certain fragrances as refreshing and restorative, in conformity with the writings of Greco-Arab, or Unani, physicians. They also described them as an adornment, using metaphors of light and colour in appreciation of the choicest fragrances, as in Persian-inspired Deccani romantic masnavis (romance narratives in rhymed couplets). The best examples of the perceived fortifying power of scents, and

3
The royal pavilions at Kumatgi, Bijapur.
Photograph: Clare Arni.

of their role in "adorning" the sultan's court and gardens with light and colour, are provided in the Deccani masnavis of Mulla Nusrati, *Gulshan-i Ishq* and *Ali Nama*, both written at the 'Adil Shahi court of Bijapur in the 17th century.

As adornment, fragrances were also pleasure-giving and pleasure-awakening. This association with adornment and pleasure is the most sustained impression of fragrances in Deccani poetry, markedly manifest in the verses composed by the Deccani sultans themselves. In his qasida (ode) commemorating Vasant, the Golconda sultan Muhammad Quli delights in the fragrances of ambergris and aloeswood, of musk and saffron which, he says, have transformed the world into a gulistan (rose garden). The trees in his gulistan wave with joy as the wind carrying the 52 fragrances of kadam (derived from the "52" stigmas of the globular flower-head of *Anthocephalus cadamba*) surges through them, and the flowers of his garden open up to fill the air with their fragrances. At the commemoration of Nauruz, the Persian New Year, the sultan urges his ladies to spread joy around by burning ud and baramki (types of incenses) and by anointing their bosoms with kadam. And, during the rains, at Barsat, when the women troop into the garden like a train of red rain beetles, and the bees and moths sing Malhar (songs of rains) in the jasmine bushes, the sultan reminds them that it is time to celebrate the onset of the season with appropriate joy-giving odours.[9]

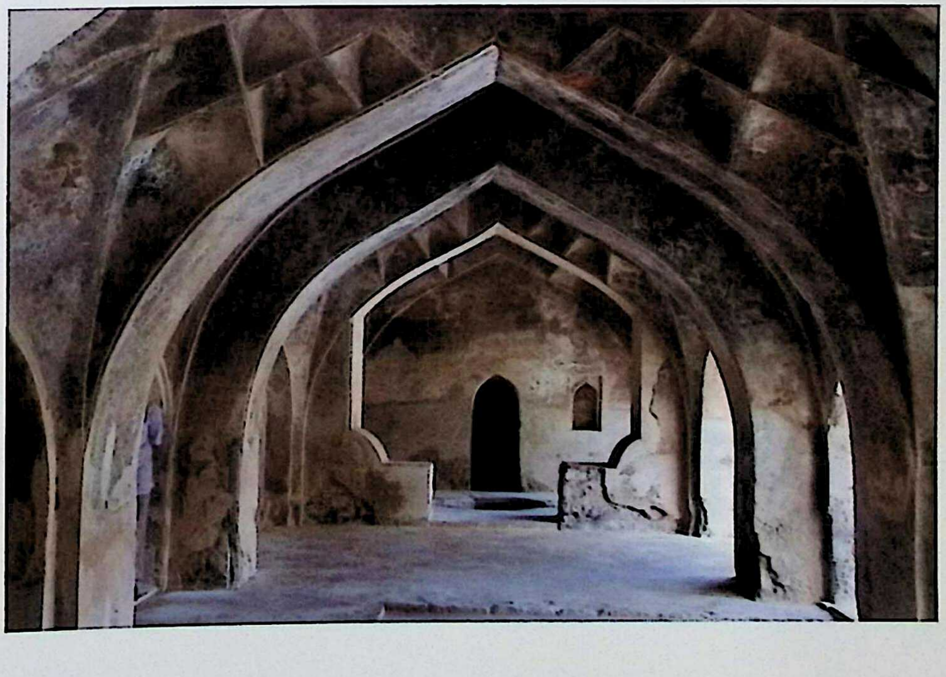


If aroma and aromatic substances evoked pleasant and sensual responses at the Deccan courts, it seems natural that fragrances played an important part in the creation of "aromatic atmospheres" in the garden pavilions that served as khwabgahs. The early sources for Indian gardens portray them as places of enjoyment and we are told that the gardens attached to palaces and wealthy households were in fact termed "pleasure gardens" (kridavana, kelikanana, pramadavana).[10] Gardens were used for a variety of purposes in the kingdoms created by the Delhi sultans, the Deccan sultans, and the Mughals. Upholding their ancestral traditions, these largely Persian-speaking peoples of the north, who had swept across the Indian subcontinent in wave after wave, spent much of their lives in gardens, at first pitching their tents in them like nomads, before making more permanent garden pavilions within their palace grounds. Gardens were used privately and publicly—for composing and reading poetry, for enjoying the huqqa (hookah), for scholarly discourse and poetry recitation, for court ceremonial and political meetings, and for the commemoration of births, weddings and religious and quasi-religious holidays. Eid, Nauruz and Vasant were commemorated in gardens with feasts, music, dance, wine, with fireworks and colour, and other forms of revelry.

Some gardens, or parts of them, were sanctioned for the exclusive use of women, such as the pa'in bagh adjoining palace pavilions and khwabgahs (literally providing gardens "at their feet"). Pools and tanks in larger gardens served, on occasion, as the domain of the zenana where the ladies of the court could swim and wade in private. Interestingly, gardens were used for cooking too, as illustrated in the *Ni'matnama* (The Book of Delights), a 15th-century text written at the court of the Malwa sultan, Ghiyasuddin Shah, about culinary and other delights. And, as could be imagined, gardens were ideal places for amorous pursuits, perhaps more so in the evenings when night-blooming flowers opened up for pollination and released their fragrances. In a large pleasure garden which served as a halting place for a travelling army, a bed for the sultan could be set up on a raised garden terrace, or chabutra, where he could savour floral fragrances, ideally with a companion and perhaps by moonlight. A garden pavilion at the royal palace served a similar purpose, affording greater privacy.

An illustration from a manuscript of the *Gulshan-i Ishq* of Mulla Nusrati shows a pavilion (referred to in the text as a chitarsal or "picture gallery") in a garden setting (figure 1). This image is from one of eight manuscripts of Nusrati's romantic masnavi. Executed in Bijapur in the late 17th century, and now in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, it illustrates a garden of union—the meeting place of the two lovers of the romance after a long and agonizing separation. The garden pavilion, partially shown here, is apparently one of several spaces, as suggested by a door opening onto it from another space. The pavilion appears to be a khwabgah to which the garden, abloom with lala and sunbul (tulip and hyacinth), is attached, literally at its feet, as a pa'in bagh was in harem palaces and pavilions.

While there is no archaeological evidence of a khwabgah pavilion within the citadel of Bijapur, Kumatgi, a hunting resort centred on a man-made lake some miles outside Bijapur, furnishes reasonably well-preserved evidence of a pair of royal pavilions that were part of extensive gardens and plantations around the lake that came into use occasionally when the sultan wished to hunt (figures 3–5). Of this pair, the shower pavilion, a two-storeyed structure within a pool, carried a water storage



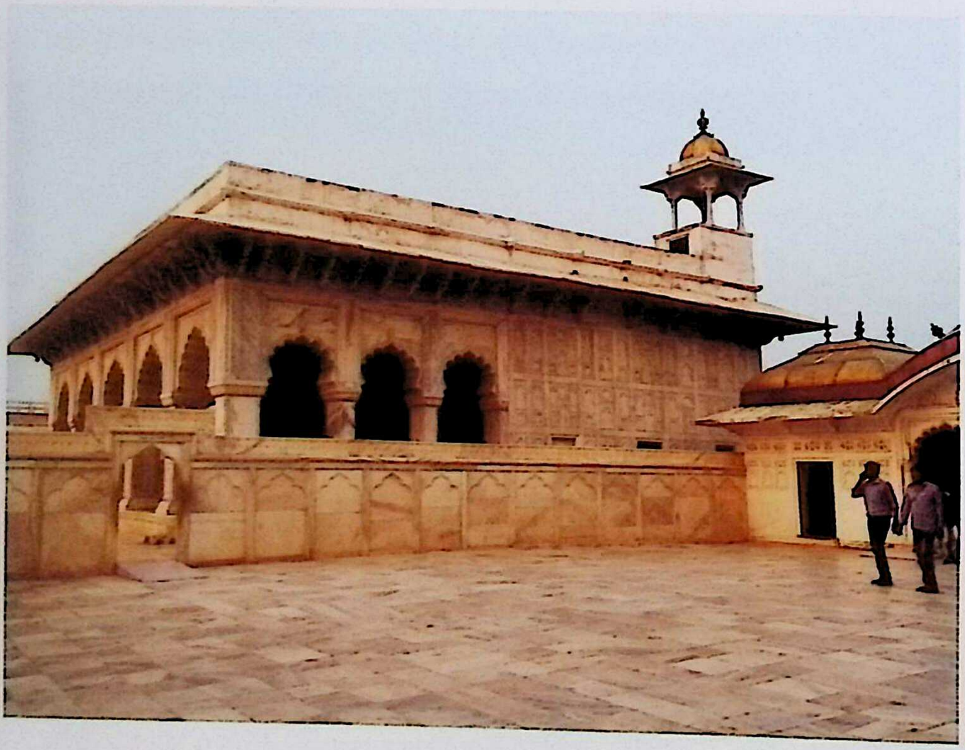
**4**
The shower pavilion at Kumatgi, Bijapur. Photograph: Clare Arni.

**5**
The interior of the chitarsal pavilion at Kumatgi, Bijapur. Photograph: Clare Arni.

tank which became a "cloud shower" above an in-built bathtub when needed, with peacock brackets positioned on the walls at two levels spouting water into the tub. The other pavilion, with cusped pools and frescoes, could be described as a chitarsal which, in all likelihood, doubled as a khwabgah. This model of the sultan's pleasure pavilions within a garden was emulated by his court nobles who built many similar pavilions at other sites around the vast man-made lake. Unfortunately, these have all but crumbled away. The gardens around these pavilions have disappeared too, although the hydraulic system at the sultan's pavilions, bringing water from the lake, storing it in a water tower, and channelling it for various purposes, has been restored.

Physical evidence of royal khwabgah pavilions may be seen in northern India and Pakistan at the Mughal forts of Agra, Delhi and Lahore, and Rajput citadels at various places in Rajasthan. The Khas Mahal at the harem in the Agra fort is a well-preserved example of a royal khwabgah pavilion positioned between two other pavilions (figures 6 and 7). The Khas Mahal consists of an outer open part, the portico or dalan, and a closed inner part at the rear which houses the bedchambers that are walled on two facing sides. The royal khwabgah of the Khas Mahal overlooks a four-quartered garden or charbagh literally "at its feet". Called Anguri Bagh, the garden was once planted with marigold and cockscomb, a maroon-and-orange colour combination that was especially pleasing to the Mughals.

At the Delhi and Lahore forts, a series of pavilions, which include the royal khwabgah, are lined up against one boundary of the citadel along the rivers Yamuna and Ravi respectively (figures 8–10). The pavilions open onto the river on one side and to fragrance-filled charbaghs of the zenana on the other. A Mughal khwabgah that formed part of a temporary residence in a large pleasure garden on a travel route



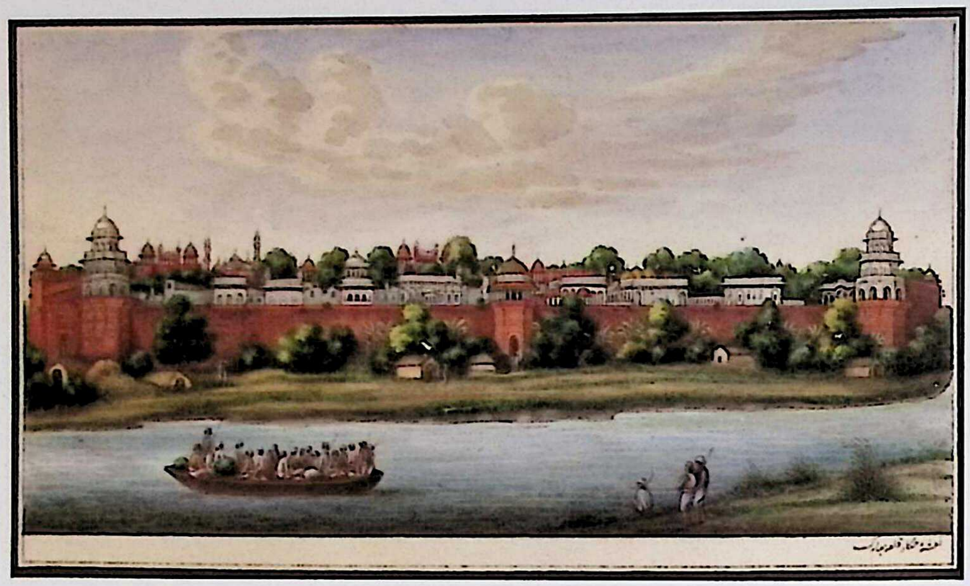
**6**
**The Khas Mahal (Khwabgah), Agra Fort. Photograph: Ali Akbar Husain.**

still exists on the uppermost, zenana, terrace of the Shalimar Bagh in Lahore, along a perimeter wall (figure 11). Thus, within or outside the citadel, the khwabgah pavilion was an integral part of a garden and became "a garden within a garden" when filled with incenses and floral fragrances.

So what incenses and floral fragrances filled up the spaces of the sultan's khwabgah at Bijapur, as suggested in the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*? Composed by the perfumer (attar), Nizamuddin Mahmud, the son of one Maulana Habibullah Sharif, the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* was gifted to Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II in the 17th century (figure 2). The aesthetically inclined sultan was titled "Nauras Shah" (The King of Nine Essences) as the nauras held a special fascination for him—he wrote a book on the subject, and founded a city called Nauraspur. In gifting a perfumery treatise to the sultan, Nizamuddin Mahmud thus had no problem, it would seem, in choosing a title: it could only be *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi* (The Fragrances of Nauras Shah).

The treatise (risala) is made up of nine compositions in 47 folios. As the author explains, each composition of the manuscript consists of a discourse (maqala) on one subject of perfumery and is divided into two sections or chapters (fasl). Each of the 18 chapters describes nine methods of preparing an aromatic product (whether essence, incense or scented oil), each method being referred to as a nauras type. If the "nau" in nauras is taken to be a colloquialization of "nav" or new, the word "nauras" may refer here to the novelty of each aromatic preparation, giving it the meaning of "novel essence". If, however, the "nau" is taken to mean "nine", nauras literally signifies the nine rasas (flavours or essences) which, according to the Indic aesthetic system, give life to an artistic creation. Extending the logic, every artistic creation should be permeated, ideally, with nine rasas, enabling the listener, reader or user, as

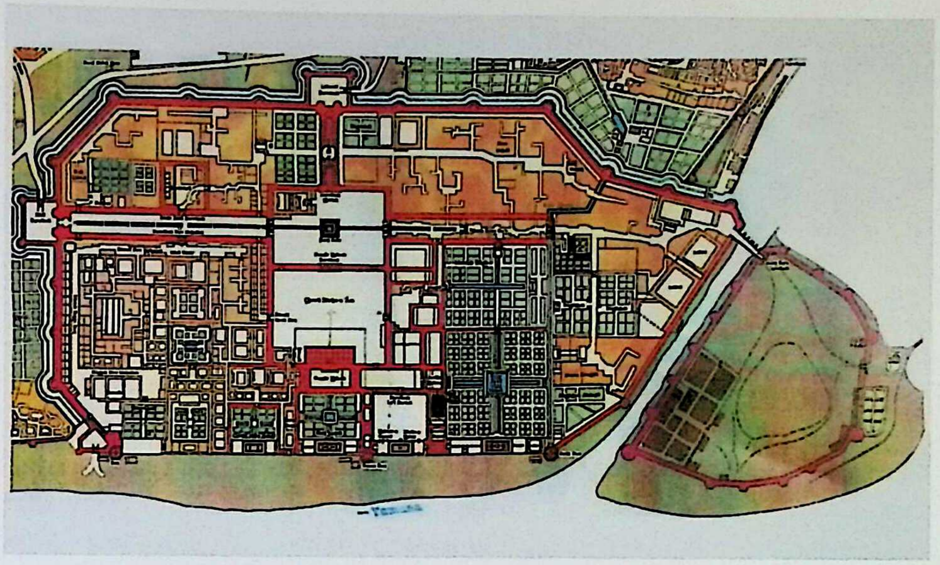
7
The Khas Mahal (Khwabgah) and Anguri Bagh, Agra Fort. Photograph: Ali Akbar Husain.



8
A 19th-century view of pavilions along the riverside wall of the Red Fort, Delhi. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the case may be, to savour the emotion (bhava) that corresponds to each rasa. But, more commonly in the Indic aesthetic system, rasa is synonymous with pleasure, especially sensual pleasure.

Nizamuddin Mahmud's listing and elaboration of his nine discourses (folios 2–21) is followed by the 18 chapters pertaining to a range of activities that made up the daily routine of the nobles at the Bijapur court, from washing and bathing to setting up the court for royal assemblies, including the sultan's famous musical gatherings. Chapter 1 (folios 21–22) is concerned with methods for making nine kinds of chuva (distilled aloeswood absorbed in sandalwood, which was used in various perfume formulations). Chapter 2 (folios 23–24) lists nine recipes for the preparation of 'abir (or gulal) powder (which has remained an important component of festivities at Holi). Chapter 3 (folios 24–25) describes nine methods for making aloeswood candles (ud batti) presumably to perfume the palace court. Chapter 4 (folios 25–26) lists nine ways of making aloeswood oil and incense (ud). Chapter 5 (folios 26–27) provides recipes for various kinds of incenses (bakhurat), perhaps for use in lakhlakhas (incense jars) adorning palace courts and for scenting bedchambers. Chapter 6 (folios 27–29) elaborates on recipes for fragrant oils. Chapter 7 (folios 29–31) discusses the nine ways of making ghaliya (a perfume made principally from camphor and ambergris which was popular in the medieval Perso-Arab world as also at the Mughal court). Chapter 8 (folios 31–33) is concerned with ways of extracting rose oil and rose water. Chapter 9 (folios 33–34) discusses nine ways of making fragrant waters (abha-i khushbu) for drinking. Chapter 10 (folios 34–35) illustrates nine ways of scenting apparel with incenses. Chapter 11 (folios 35–37) explains how perfumed candles (shama-i muanbar), including camphor candles, can be made in nine different ways.[11] Chapter 12 (folios 37–38) provides nine recipes for perfumed betel-leaf (paan), betelnut (supari) and fragrant lime (chuna). Chapter 13 (folios 38–39) discusses perfumed kahruli (a product whose identity is unclear). Chapter 14 (folios 39–42) is concerned with dental hygiene and lists kinds of scented



9
A 19th-century plan of pavilions and gardens, Red Fort, Delhi. Courtesy Archaeological Survey of India.

woods to be used as toothbrushes (miswak) and also describes methods of preparing aromatic gargles (khusbudar gharara) and dentrifices, as well as perfumed massage pastes (chiksa) and scented waters for bathing. Chapter 15 (folios 42–43) lists nine kinds of breath fresheners (mukhbas). Chapter 16 (folios 44–45) lists nine ways of perfuming the khwabgah. Chapter 17 (folios 45–46) contains nine recipes for making scented drinking water that is stored in a spouted clay pot or ewer (ibriq) and in bags made of scented hides (kimukht). Chapter 18 (folios 46–47) lists nine kinds of floral bouquets or potpourri (phulwa). This chapter is incomplete, so the actual number of folios of this manuscript may have exceeded 47.

While certain terms used for the various forms of aromatics listed above relate to the Perso-Arab traditions, such as bakhurat, ghaliya, abha-i khushbu, shama-i muanbar, miswak and khusbudar gharara, suggesting that these forms of aromatization prevailed in "Iran and Turan", the ancestral regions of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II, certain others such as paan, supari, chuna, mukhbas and chiksa originate in India and suggest the importance of breath fresheners and body toners in the Indic tradition. Much is made of betel chewing in Indic texts. Its consumption is included in the list of "royal enjoyments" in Padmasri's *Nagarasarvasvam* and the art of preparing betel quids is listed in the section on perfumery in Varahamihira's *Brihat Samhita* wherein it is stated that betel quids, properly prepared, stimulate "pleasure, love and passion", especially with the addition of certain flavourings, such as nutmeg and clove.[12] The 18 chapters of the *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*, listing the aromatic preparations at the 'Adil Shahi court, may be compared with a similar listing of topics in the *Gandhasara*. Many similarities are observed; important additions in the *Gandhasara* being chapters on "transmission of perfume" (vasana) and the "methods of blending different aromatic substances" (gandhayukti).

In writing about the first nauras composition to perfume the khwabgah, Nizamuddin Mahmud instructs his reader to hang garlands of scented flowers about the room and also strew them on the floor, and to follow this up by burning in

**10**
Khwabgah of Jahangir, Lahore Fort, Pakistan. Photograph: Ali Akbar Husain.

an incense censer pieces of aloeswood, ambergris, camphor and sandalwood (which he considers the four principal aromatics), ensuring that the door of the room is closed so that the fragrances permeate the room and—we may add—penetrate the bodies of the occupants. Daud Ali writes that "garlands and ornaments functioned as excitants (vibhavas) of the emotion of rati (pleasure)",[13] and, as Vatsyayana tells us in the *Kamasutra*, the bedroom of the "man-about-town" was ornamented with garlands and censed with fragrant incense every evening.[14]

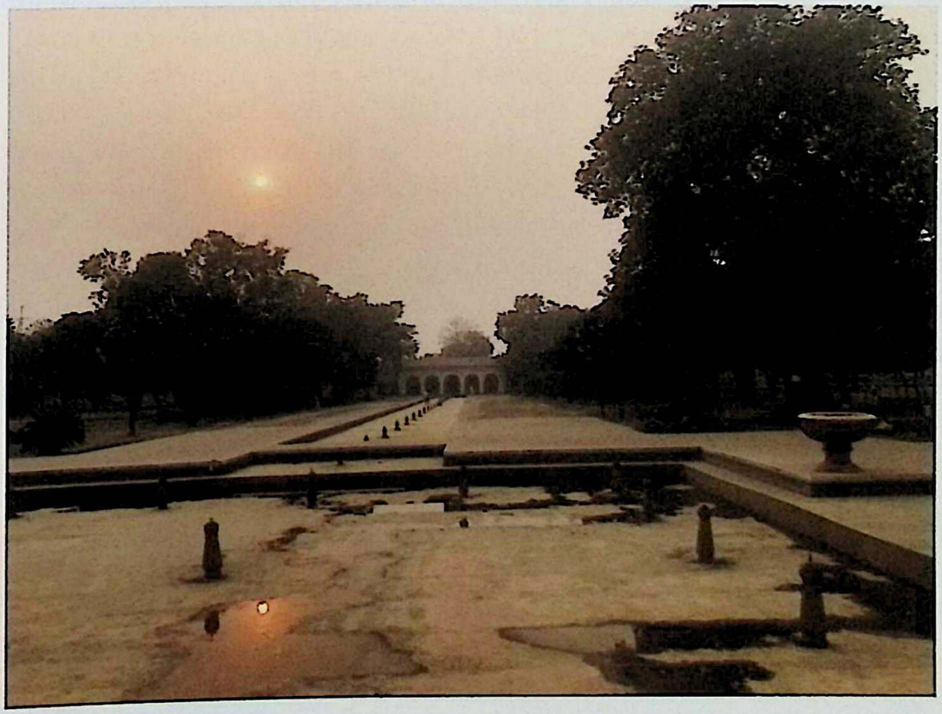
The ingredients in Nizamuddin Mahmud's second composition include kafur (camphor pieces); jau dana (barley grain); kapur kachri (the chopped-up aromatic root of a kind of ginger); *Hedychium spicatum*, an important ingredient of 'abir; chuva (distilled aloeswood soaked in rosewater); and 'ud tilia (aloeswood oil). These, the writer states, are to be mixed in sandalwood oil and sprinkled on the walls, while aloeswood is burnt in a censer and the door of the bedchamber is kept closed. He adds that a large number of scented flowers should be kept in the room, but he does not name the species. Nizamuddin Mahmud's instruction to sprinkle the walls with aromatic ingredients dissolved in sandalwood oil and to burn aloeswood incense simultaneously suggests that he was familiar with the principles of diffusion (fragrances permeating the air) and impregnation (fragrances settling upon something) that have been elaborated by Minoru Hara in his commentary on the *Gandhasara*.[15]

The third composition described is essentially a floral arrangement for a silver platter beside the bed. It includes dauna and marwa (the foliage of a species of *Artemesia* and flowers of a species of *Origanum*, always mentioned and used together in horticultural and poetic texts) and two kinds of jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*, or mogra, and *Jasminum officinale*, or chambeli). The jasmine and *Origanum* species continue to be strung together to make garlands for the hair in the flower markets of peninsular India; but now, the orange flowers of *Crossandra* are added to the mogra/marwa composition. Apparently, the khwabgah was scented by the diffusion of the volatile oils of the foliage and flowers.

Another aromatic arrangement for a bowl consists of jasmine (chambeli), a kind of rose (sewanti) and, oddly, a kind of fig (gular, *Ficus glomerata*). As in other methods, aloeswood is smoked and the writer advises that the door of the room be kept closed to retain the perfume.

The fifth composition is somewhat elaborate involving several ingredients that are chopped up, dissolved in a herb extract (sharbat-i nabat), dried, and later burnt in a censer while ensuring that the door of the bedchamber remains securely fastened so that the fragrance is diffused in the room and impregnates its various surfaces. The ingredients listed include 'abir powder; 'ud (aloeswood); silaras (storax, the resin from *Liquidambar orientalis*); chharila (a kind of lichen, growing on pine, oak and walnut trees); *Parmelia perlata*, which figures in the preparation of 'abir; deodar (the resin of the Himalayan cedar, *Cedrus deodora*); chaubara (an aromatic wood whose identity is unclear); sandalwood; malagir (described in a 1923 publication, *Khaza'in al-Adwiyya*, as a kind of fragrant wood, like sandalwood, which is chopped up and mixed with brick ash to dye and perfume clothes); frankincense (loban, a species of *Boswellia*); misri (sugar); Chinese camphor; nagar moth (the root of a kind of grass); cinnamon stick; and clove bud.

For the next procedure, the writer recommends that citrons be kept by the bedside near the pillow in a large dish topped with fragrant flowers like mogra and chambeli; kuza (probably the musk rose, *Rosa moschata*); gul-i surkh (the attar rose, *Rosa damascena*); niwali (another rose species); and gul-i champa (the showy and very fragrant champa flower, *Michelia champaca*). The writer advises that a solution of bala flowers (possibly a species of *Abutilon*) in sandalwood and distilled aloeswood (chuva) be sprinkled about the room, and, as usual, aloeswood should be smoked, and the bedsheet lifted so that it absorbs (and is impregnated by) the perfume which, the writer promises, would be enticing, invigorating and pleasure-giving.



**11**
Khwabgah, Shalimar Bagh, Lahore, Pakistan. Photograph: Ali Akbar Husain.

Aloeswood is smoked in the next procedure too, and fragrant flowers of all kinds strewn about the room. The writer also recommends that equal quantities of ambergris, musk, saffron and sandalwood (the four prized aromatics) be chopped together and sprinkled about the bedroom. The reader is cautioned once more to keep the bedroom door closed.

The advice for the eighth composition is to crush together aloeswood, sandalwood, frankincense, musk, ghaliya, camphor and barley grain with an equal quantity of cardamom and sprinkle the powder in the room. At the same time, aloeswood is to be burnt in a censer, and once again scented flowers should be arranged in the room.

The final procedure calls for decorating the room by hanging and suspending garlands of scented flowers of all kinds and sprinkling over these a blend of camphor, ambergris, musk, aloeswood, frankincense, storax, kapur kachri, behman (the root of a species of *Centaurea*) and badhar moth (the root of a species of grass) chopped together and soaked in rosewater. Once more, aloeswood must be burnt and the door kept firmly closed.

The compositions described by Nizamuddin Mahmud generally combine floral fragrances with the smoke of aloeswood. Additionally, aromatic roots, resins and gums, woods, lichens and animal secretions, in various forms and combinations, are crushed and burnt, pulverized and scattered about the room, or sprinkled dissolved in sandalwood oil or herbal extracts. Disappointingly, Mahmud does not provide any insights as to how the various ingredients work together within each perfume composition, but he writes with great authority about the capabilities of these compositions, and their individual components, to fortify both the heart and the carnal appetite. Judging from works on aromatics in the Greco-Arab (Unani) medicinal tradition, Mahmud's compositions may have worked by complementing and enhancing, or neutralizing, each other to achieve a desired temperate, cooling or warming effect, depending on the time of the year and a person's innate makeup.

Interestingly, the rationale for perfume-blending expounded in the *Gandhasara* considers aromatic materials to be of three kinds: mitra (agreeable), udasina (neutral) and satru (contradictory).[16] The same have been termed "allies, neutrals and enemies" by James McHugh.[17] The *Gandhasara* provides a list of substances in each category and indicates in what ratio each is to be added to the perfume composition. Thus, "An agreeable substance should be blended in equal quantity (with another agreeable substance), the neutral substance should be half of the quantity of the (agreeable) substance, and only a quarter of the substance that is contradictory in nature should be blended with any other substance."[18] Thus, in apparent agreement with the Greco-Arab medicinal system, and in continuation of earlier Indic texts, the *Gandhasara* maintains that two opposed and contrasting odour types—the agreeable and the contradictory—complement or neutralize each other. And, in a similar vein to his Unani counterparts, the author of the *Gandhasara* contends that "different perfumes possess the power to create a great variety of effects and therefore can be used with benefit if the humour of the person is known prior to use".[19]

This essay has traced the relationship between perfume and aesthetic pleasure from the earliest extant texts on the subject in India, ending with a focus on the 17thcentury *'Itrya-i Nauras Shahi*. It is evident from the sustained use of aromatics in the Indian subcontinent as a whole, that the concept of fragrances as pleasure-enhancing was part of a shared knowledge and behavioural responses to scent were culturally understood. To perfume the sultan's khwabgah, various combinations of floral odours and incenses (based on animal secretions and plant parts) were crafted: the milder, highly volatile odours of champa and citron, of rose and jasmine, tempered and sealed with the more enduring odours of musk and ambergris, burnt resins and gums, and smoked aloeswood. Scattered, sprinkled, strewn and burnt, this mix of incenses, floral fragrances and perfumed lamp-wicks[20] conceivably permeated the contained space of the khwabgah, conditioning the occupants to the experience of pleasure, an experience, we may be sure, that was enhanced by the other sensory stimuli of the khwabgah—furnishings, garments, jewelled ornaments, betel quids and music—all within the setting of the sultan's pleasure garden.

**Notes**

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2 Peter Damian and Kate Damian, "Environmental Fragrancing", in J. Drobnick, ed., *The Smell Culture Reader* (New York: Berg, 2006), pp. 148, 150.

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4 D. Ali, "Gardens in Early Indian Court Life", *Studies in History*, 19:2 (2003), p. 228.

5 R.T. Vyas, ed., *Gangadhara's* Gandhasara *and an Unknown Author's* Gandhavada (Vadodara: University of Baroda Press, 1989), pp. 48, 53.

6 A.A. Husain, "Perfuming the Heart: A Study of a 17th c Perfumery Treatise from Islamic India", in D. Ruggles, ed., *Sound and Scent in the Garden* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017), p. 109.

7 Ibid., p. 110.

8 A.A. Husain, "The Courtly Gardens of Abdul's *Ibrahim Nama*", in Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar, eds., *Sultans of the South: Art of India's Deccan Courts 1323–1687* (New York: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 86.

9 S. Jafar, ed., *Kulliyat Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah* (Delhi: Taraqqi-e Urdu Bureau, 1985), pp. 337, 368, 371, 372.

10 Ali, "Gardens in Early Indian Court Life", p. 224.

11 Lamps with "perfumed wicks" for the royal palace are considered in the *Nagarasarvasvam* to be madanodbhava, that is, "tending to arouse passion". Vyas, *Gangadhara's* Gandhasara, p. 61.

12 Zumbroich, "From Mouth Fresheners to Erotic Perfumes", p. 73.

13 Ali, "Gardens in Early Indian Court Life", p. 235.

14 J. McHugh, "The Incense Trees of the Land of Emeralds: The Exotic Material Culture of *Kamasastra*", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 39 (2011), p. 66.

15 M. Hara, "A Note on Sanskrit Gandha", *Studio Orientalia*, 108 (2010), p. 76. Hara writes, "One of the characteristic features of gandha is its movement. Leaving its sources (āśraya), gandha either dissolves in the air or settles in something else."

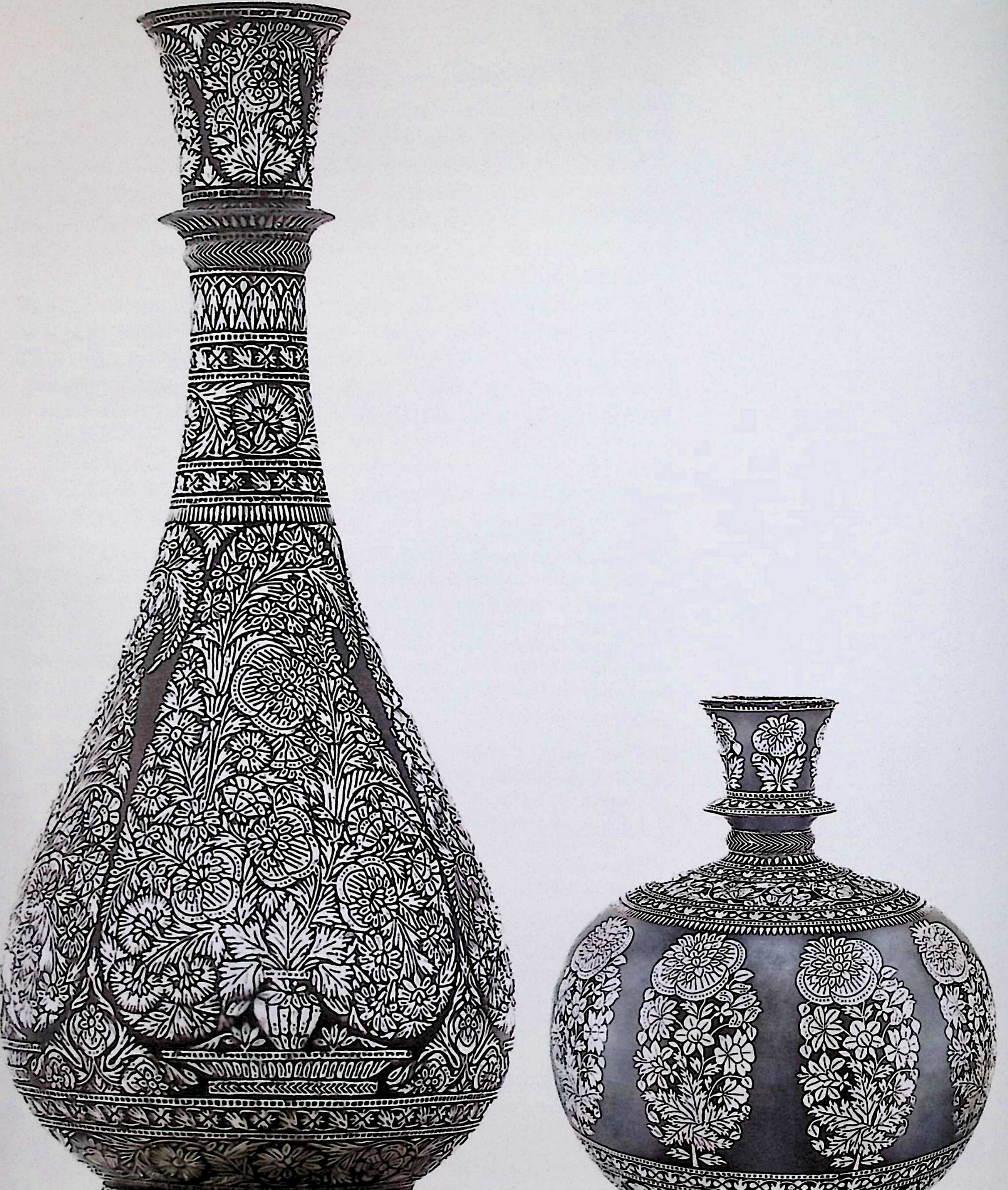
16 Vyas, *Gangadhara's* Gandhasara, p. 70.

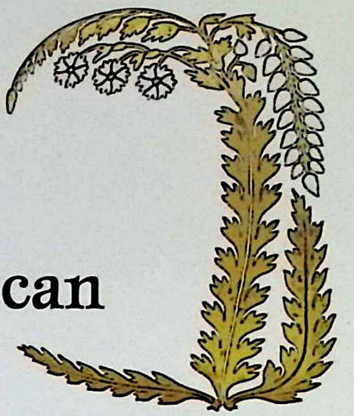
17 McHugh, "The Incense Trees", p. 79.

18 Vyas, *Gangadhara's* Gandhasara, p. 70.

19 Ibid., p. 71.

20 Ibid., pp. 35, 61.





# Bidri Ware
## A Fascinating Craft of the Deccan

*Jagdish Mittal*

Bidri ware, a fascinating and unique type of Indian metalware, takes its name from Bidar, a city in northern Karnataka that was once the capital of the Bahmani (1347–1538) and Barid Shahi (1487–1619) sultanates. Bidar was seized by the 'Adil Shahis of Bijapur in 1619, annexed by the Mughals in 1656, and ultimately incorporated into Asaf Jahi (1724–1949) domains. Technically, bidri ware is a variety of encrusted metalware in which one metal is inlaid in or overlaid on another. The metal used for bidri objects is an alloy of 85 per cent zinc, 12 per cent copper, and 3 per cent lead or tin.

### Origin

The origin of bidri work is controversial. Craftsmen at Bidar maintain that immigrants from Iran or Iraq brought the technique to Bidar via Bijapur during the Bahmani period. Although some Bahmani sultans had encouraged men of learning from overseas to come and settle at Bidar, this account cannot be accurate, for the particular metal alloy used in bidri work and the technical processes involved in this work are unknown in other countries. It is quite possible, however, that immigrants from West Asia introduced the basic technique of metal inlay, rather than the entire process of bidri work.

Local sources of inspiration for bidri work have also been proposed. One was a type of inlay found on five massive cannons produced for the Barid Shahi sultans between 1569 and 1591 and installed on the bastions of Bidar fort. These impressive iron guns are decorated with floral arabesques and inscriptions in brass and silver. Another bronze cannon kept on a high bastion of Kalyani fort, Balavakalyan, 15 kilometres west of Bidar, is inlaid with brass arabesques and inscriptions, including one that reads "workshop of the Barid Shahis" (karkhanabaridshahi). The connection to Kalyani is significant because it was a celebrated centre for damascene (koftgari) work, which resembles bidri work in appearance but consists of steel objects inlaid with gold or silver. The contrast between the shining metal inlay and the dark colour of iron in damascene work might have inspired a local craftsman to imitate this effect on smaller bidri objects.

1
Vase-shaped hookah-base, Deccan, Bidar, mid-19th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 24.5 cm. Acc. no. 76.1260.

2
Globular hookah-base, Deccan, Bidar, c. 1750. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 18 cm, D: 15.5 cm. Acc. no. 76.1248.

Another potential source of inspiration for bidri work is the mother-of-pearl inlay on the polished black stone inner doorway of the Rangin Mahal, a palace built at Bidar for Ali Barid (r. 1543–80). However, these local types of inlay work seem to be only tangential factors in the history of bidri, for it is the hitherto unknown composition of the metal alloy and the blackening paste used in bidri objects that make it a truly unique type of metalware. It is most likely, therefore, that the particular composition of the metal alloy and the precise technique used in bidri were accidental discoveries by anonymous craftsmen. Because no known bidri object can be dated before 1625, craftsmen probably arrived at this unique combination in the early 17th century, when Bidar was under 'Adil Shahi rule.

### Technical Process

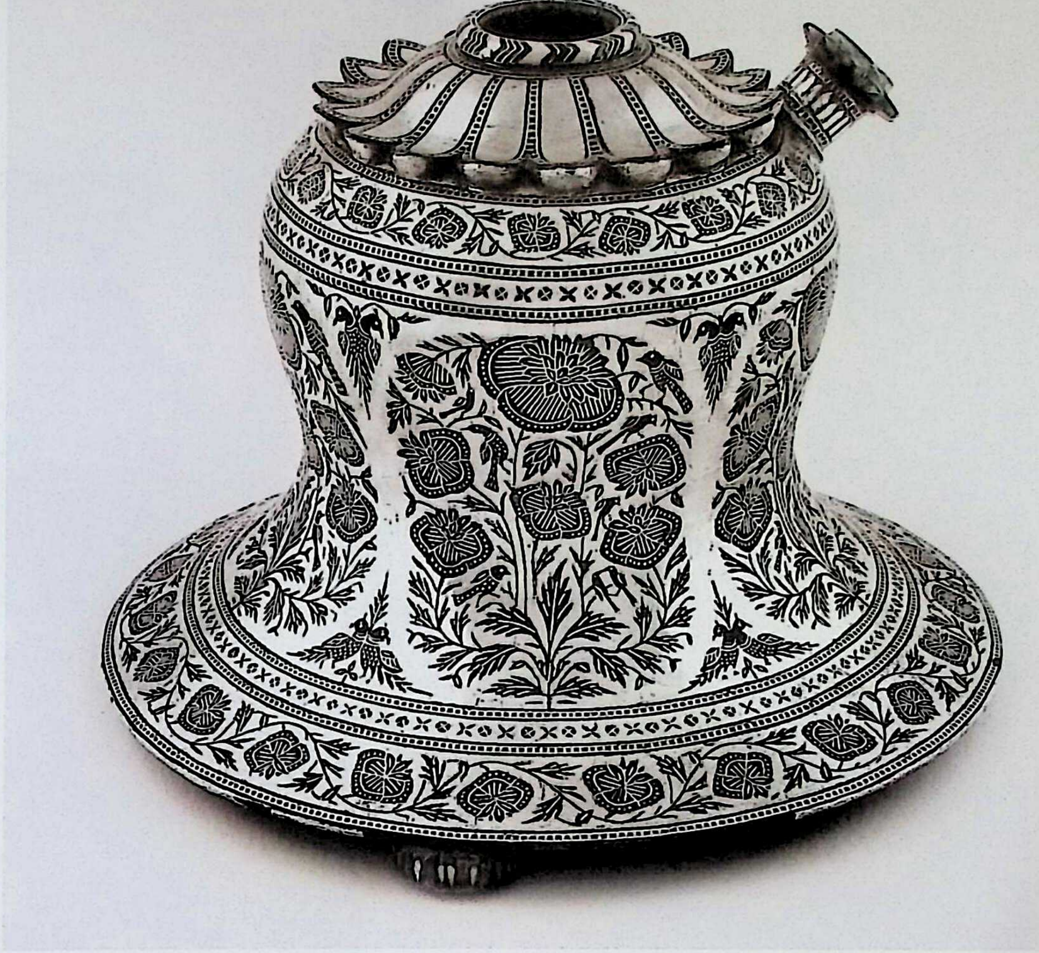
The process involved in the manufacture of bidri objects is almost the same everywhere this work is done. The different stages are executed by five classes of artisans: the moulder, the designer, the engraver, the inlayer and the one who applies the blackening paste.

In linear designs, the design is inlaid by hammering strands of wire into engraved grooves; in large flat areas of the design, pieces of silver or brass of the same size and thickness as the chiselled-out pattern are placed in their desired position, and secured there by hammering down the raised edges of the chiselled-out area. In the final stage, the fifth craftsman polishes the object and gives its surface a permanent black colour by applying a blackening paste that leaves the inlaid designs unaffected and brilliant. The object is exposed to the open air for several hours, then washed with water, and finally rubbed with oil. The resulting contrast between the inlaid metal—silver, brass or gold—and the object's matte black background lies at the heart of bidri's visual appeal.

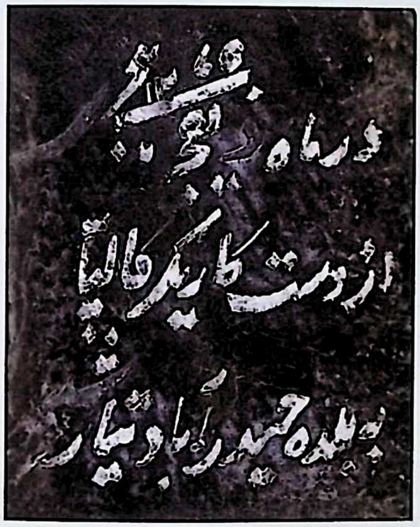
Five main types of inlay are distinguished in bidri ornamentation. The work is known as tarkasi if only wire is inlaid (figure 1); as tehnishan if the inlay is flush with the surface of the object (figure 2); as mahtabi or aftabi if the design looks black against the overlaid metal sheet (figure 3b); as zarnishan if the inlaid pieces are in low relief; and zarbuland if those pieces are in high relief.

### Early Accounts

The earliest historical evidence of the production of this metalware is a mention of Bidar as a centre of bidri work that is found in the second volume of *Chahar Gulshan*, a history of Mughal India written in Persian and dated 1759, based on an earlier work of 1720. A second bit of evidence comes from a Mughal-period map of Bidar province (suba), included in an atlas made for the French General Gentil at Faizabad (now in Uttar Pradesh) in 1770. It shows a craftsman chiselling a motif on a globular hookah-base, a form representative of bidri ware of that period. Confirmation of its production at Lucknow comes from an oil painting made by the British artist Tilly Kettle at Faizabad in 1772, which depicts a dancing girl holding the stem of an encrusted black hookah that is characteristic of the bidri of nearby Lucknow. Bidri



**3a and b**
Three-footed skirted hookah-base (Farshi hookah) with inscription on inner surface, Deccan, Hyderabad, dated July 1859, by Malappa. Bidri, inlaid with silver;
H: 15 cm, D: 19 cm. Acc. no. 76.1266.

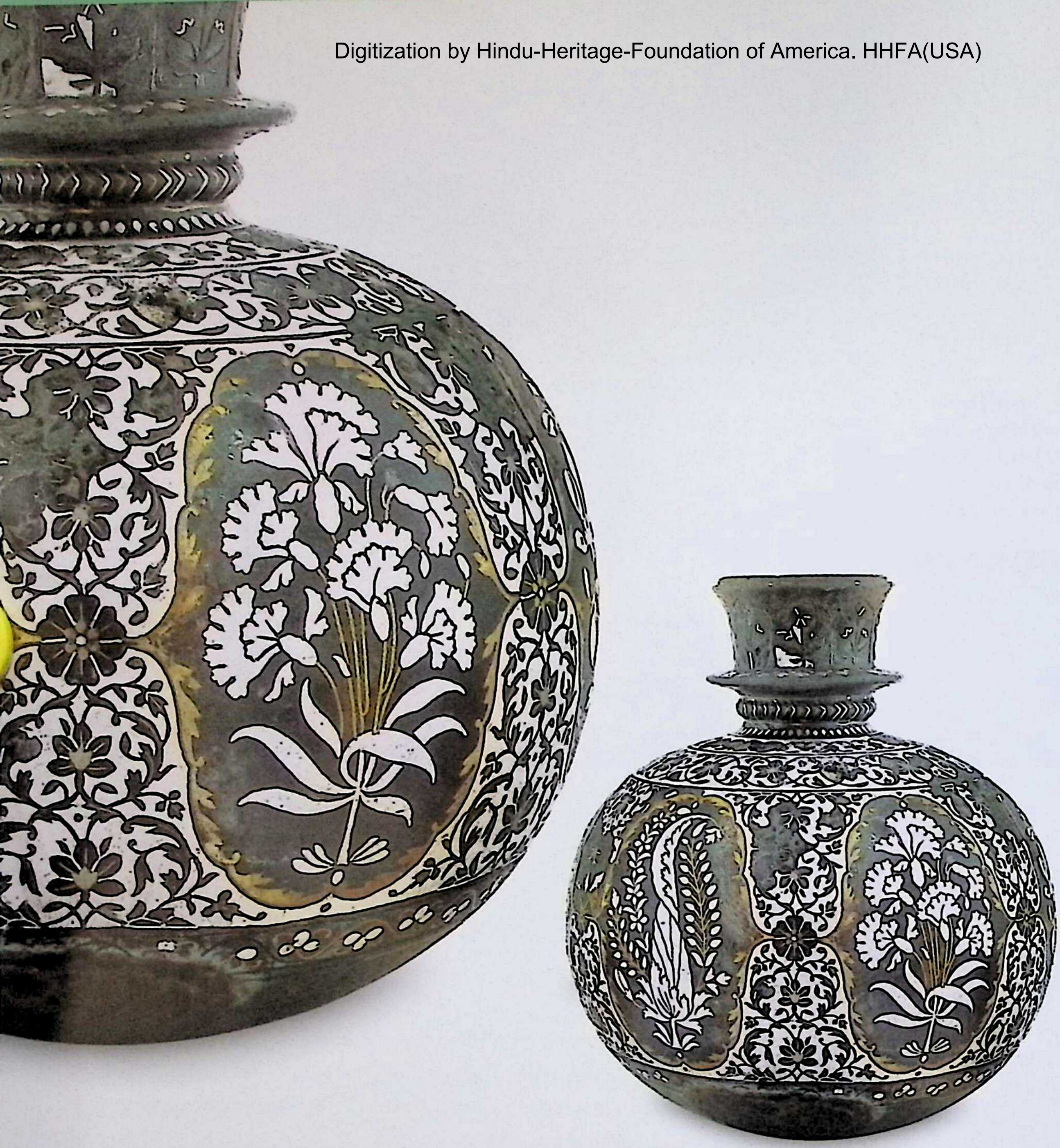


objects also appear in some 17th- and 18th-century miniature paintings from the Deccan, Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills. The first foreign scholar to take notice of this craft at Bidar was the Scottish botanist Benjamin Heyne (1770–1819), who published in 1817 an article describing its metal alloy.

## Early Bidris

The earliest dated bidri object is a globular hookah-base inlaid in silver and brass in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art (hereafter JKMMIA), Hyderabad (figure 4). The inscription around its base gives the Hijra date 1044, equivalent to 1634 CE. Among other rare early 17th-century examples of bidri are an ewer (aftaba) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and a large tray in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad. Both objects are inlaid with brass and silver. While the ewer is decorated with arabesques in the mahtabi technique, the tray is embellished with a pattern of aquatic creatures and fish in water in the tarkasi and tehnishan techniques.

Some globular bidri hookah-bases have particularly beautiful designs on their bodies. Several have a garden scene with pavilions, but most are decorated with various Deccani designs or versions of the Mughalized motif of a naturalistic flowering plant. This latter motif was adopted from European art during the reign of Jahangir



(r. 1605–27), and reached its greatest prominence under Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58). It became the hallmark of most Mughal decorative arts from the mid-17th century, and influenced artisans all over Mughal India, including craftsmen who made bidri ware in Bidar.

### The Development of Shapes and Decoration

From the mid-17th until the early 18th century, bidri objects derived their shapes from metalware of the Islamic world. Most early bidris are hookah-bases, plates, ewers (figure 5), spittoons, betel-boxes (paandaans), bed-legs (palang-pae) and carpet weights (mir-farsh).

The most popular object by far was the hookah-base, which was part of a water-pipe device used in smoking tobacco, a habit introduced to the Mughal court in 1605. The custom of using a bidri hookah-base first took hold among the nobles of the

4

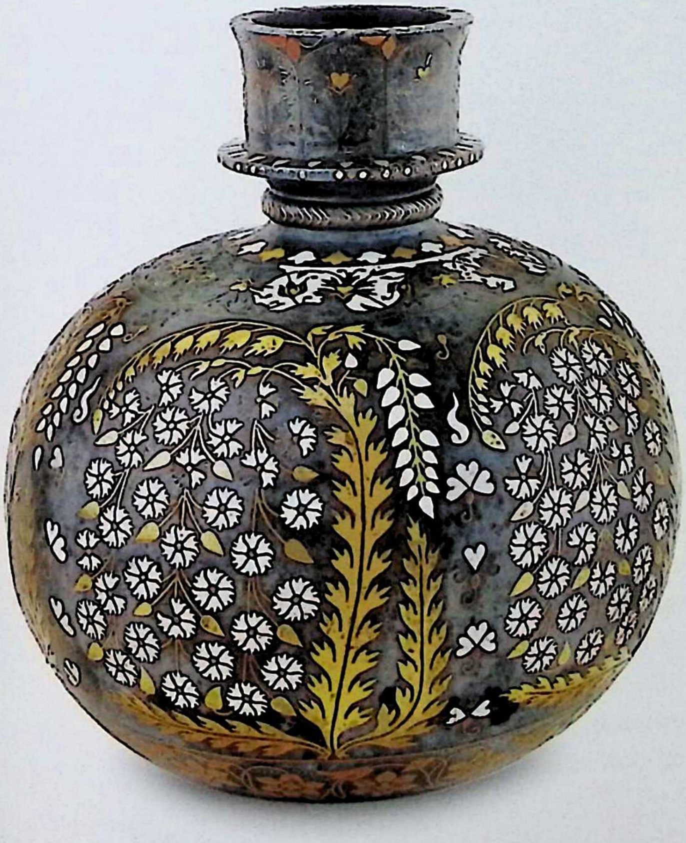
Globular hookah-base, Deccan, Bidar, dated October 1634 CE. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; H: 17.3 cm, D: 16 cm. Acc. no. 76.1222.

5

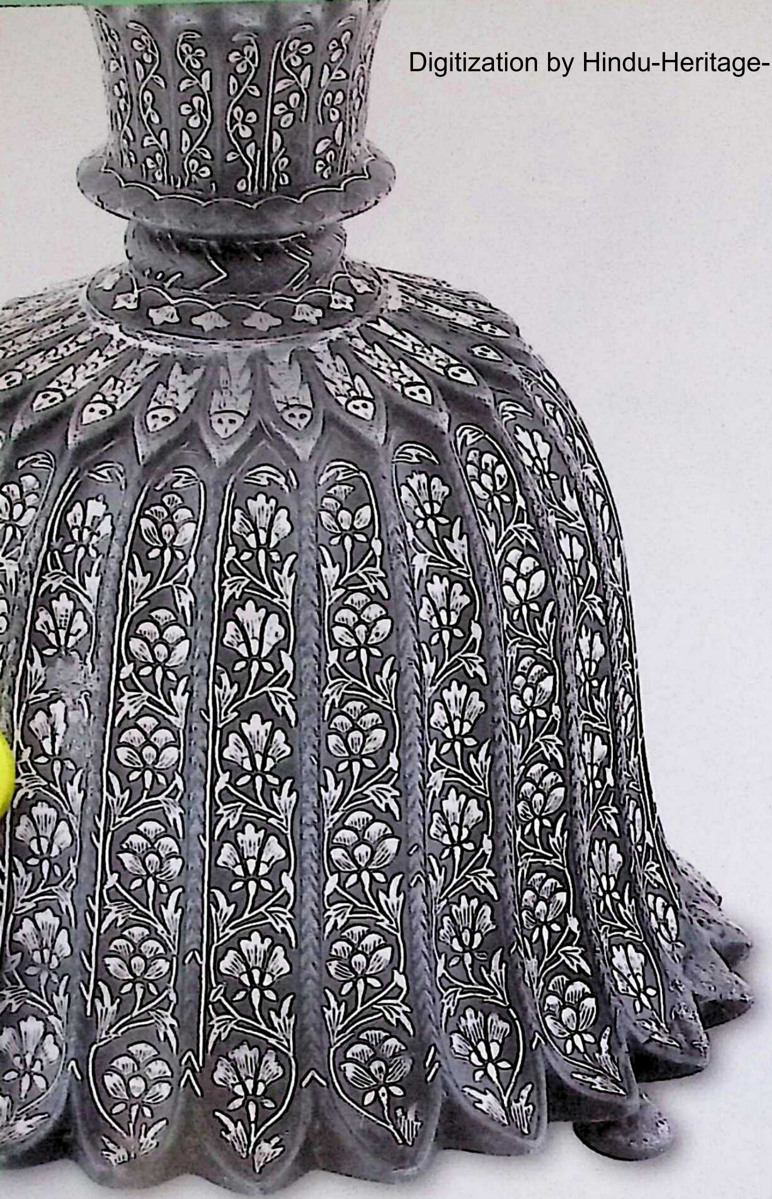
Ewer (aftaba), cover missing, Deccan, Bidar, second half of the 17th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; H: 29 cm. Acc. no. 76.1226.

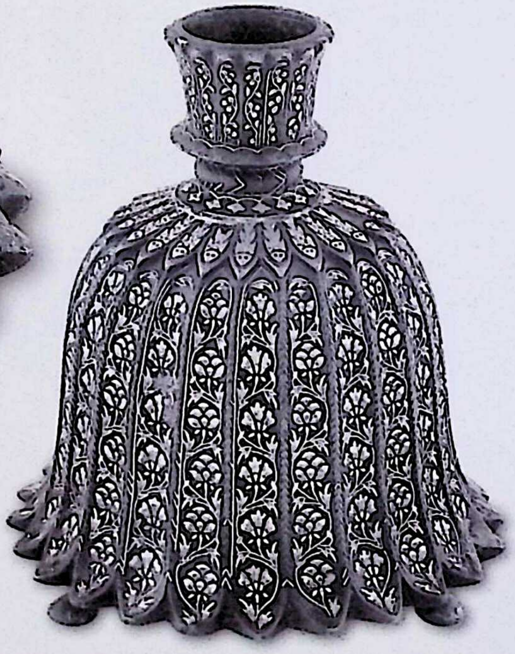
6

Globular hookah-base, Deccan, Bidar, c. 1675. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; H: 20 cm, D: 18.9 cm. Acc. no. 76.1223.



Mughal and Deccani courts, and the Hindu rajas of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, the Punjab Hills and Bengal. No Deccani sultan used a hookah for smoking before 1650, nor did any Mughal emperor before the 1720s. Hookah-bases were globular from the 1630s until the mid-18th century (figures 4 and 6), when they gave way to a flat-bottomed, bell-shaped form (figure 7). From the late 18th century until the early 19th century, the splayed bell of the hookah-base became wider towards the bottom with each decade. During the second half of the 18th century, bud-shaped hookah-bases (kaliyan) also came into fashion. In the early 19th century, some new shapes such as vase-shaped (figure 1), trumpet-shaped and waisted hookah-bases became common.





7
Bell-shaped hookah-base with vertically fluted body, Deccan, Bidar, mid-18th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 16.5 cm, D: 14.9 cm. Acc. no. 76.1250.

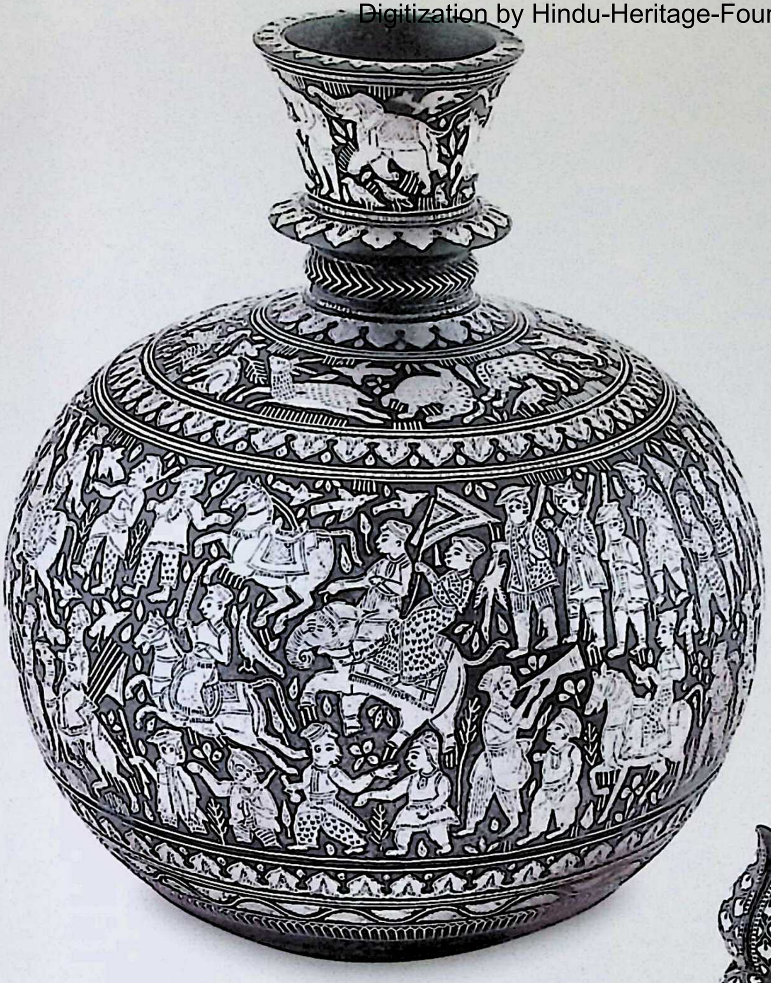
8
Globular hookah-base with a royal procession, Deccan, Bidar, c. 1800. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 16.5 cm, D: 16.5 cm. Acc. no. 76.1247.

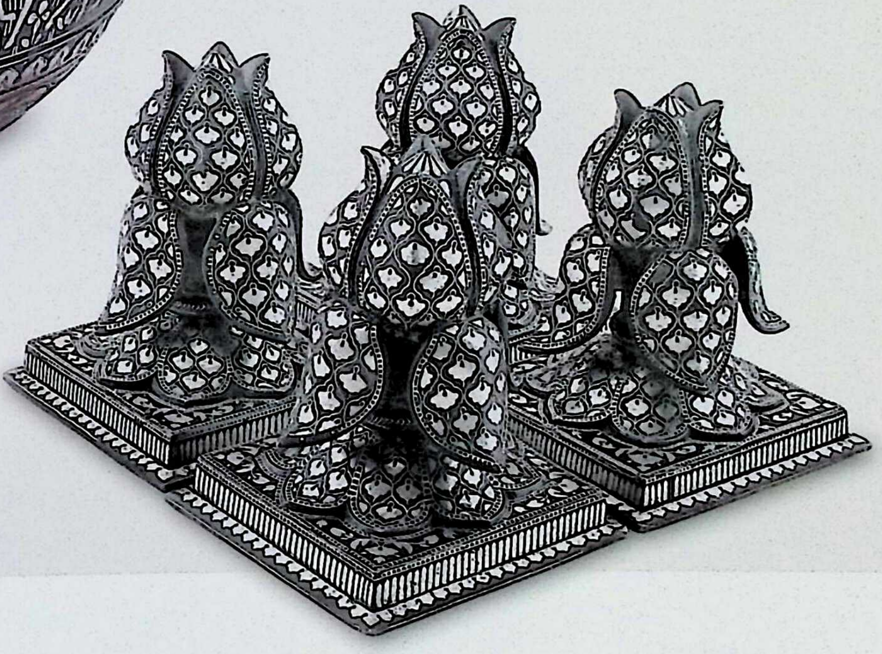
9
Carpet weights (mir-farsh), set of four, Deccan, Bidar, late 18th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver; each H: 13 cm, W: 11.3 cm. Acc. no. 76.1259.

While hookah-bases dominated the production of bidri ware during the 18th and 19th centuries (figure 8), the scope of other objects made in this technique broadened to include dishes, bowls (some decorated with Arabic calligraphy), trays, vases, washbasins, ewers, betel-boxes, water-bottles, bed-legs, candelabras, carpet weights (figure 9) and incense-burners. In the second half of the 19th century, even bidri bookstands, mirror frames, tables and chairs were made.

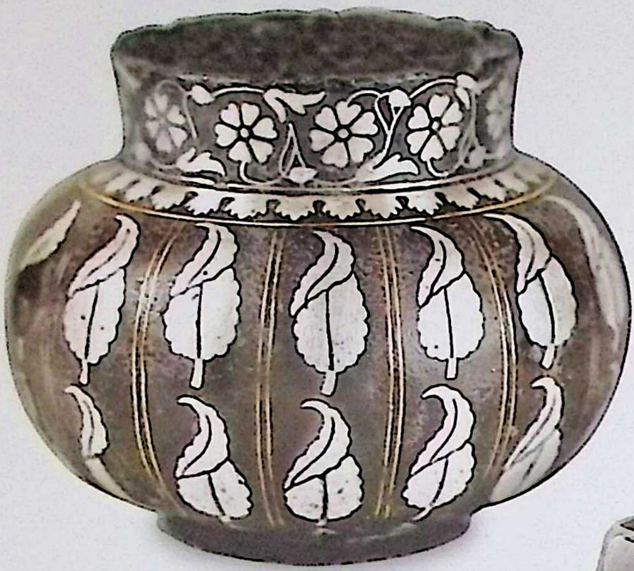
There is great variety of design in bidris made at Bidar between 1635 and 1725 (figures 5, 6, 10–13). The inlay is mostly done in silver and brass together, and only rarely in silver and gold. After 1725, only silver is used.

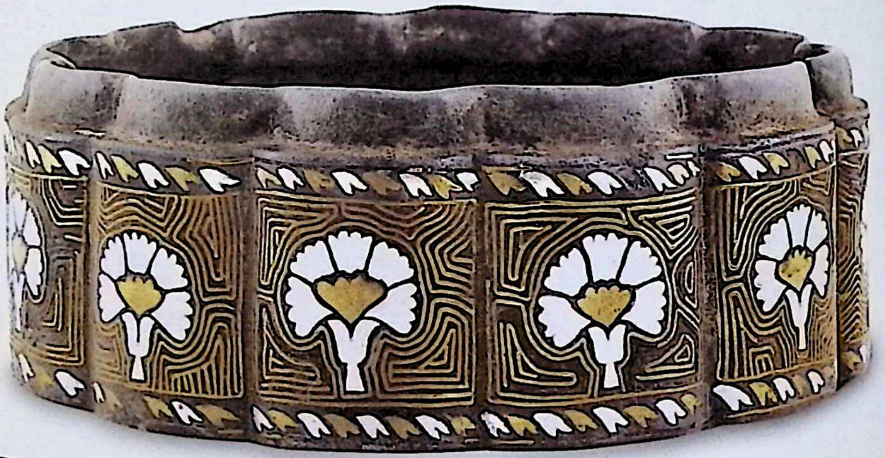
From the mid-18th century, certain designs became standard on Bidar bidris. The growing political domination of the Deccan by European powers saw the

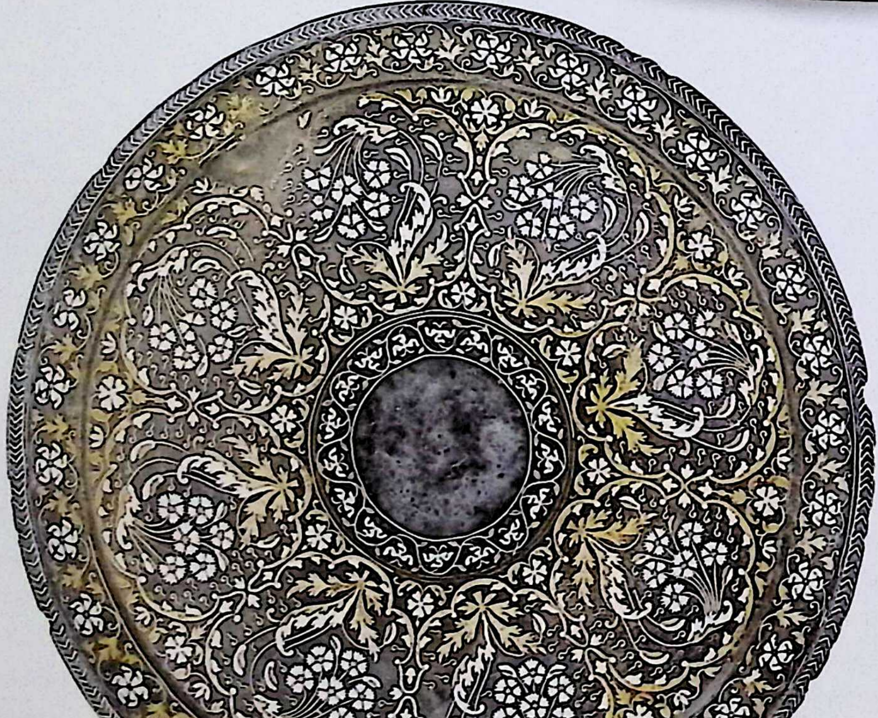




introduction of European shapes and motifs into bidri objects. Nonetheless, the overall effect continued to have a pronounced Deccani flavour. In the middle period, c. 1725–75, the motifs used on bidri ware made at Bidar were exotic flowers, plants in bloom, floral butis, diaper patterns in ogival shapes, floral arabesques and calligraphic renderings of Shi'ite or Quranic verses (figure 14). The poppy-flower motif became common in bidri from the mid-18th century (figure 2); the same period that saw formal beds of poppy flowers become a staple in Hyderabadi paintings. This tendency was still more pronounced in the roughly executed works of the 19th century, which featured either poppy-flower motifs or the coriander-leaf shapes of the kothmir design.



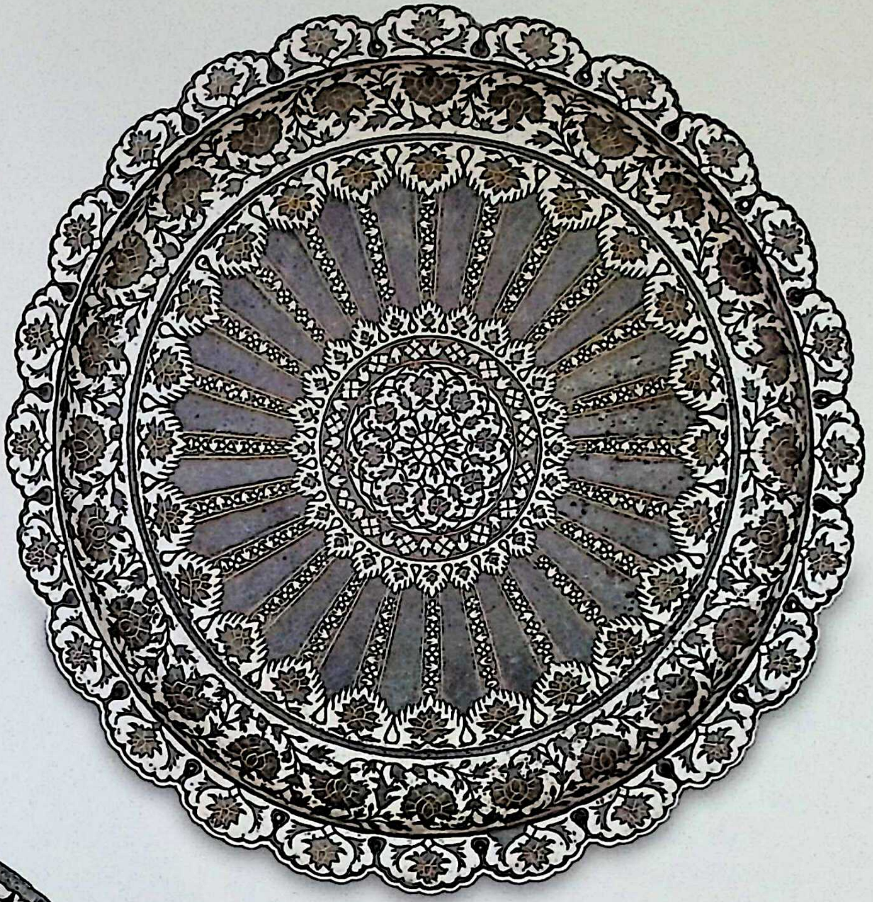




**10**
Small globular vase with low neck and foot-ring, Deccan, Bidar, second half of the 17th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; H: 8.5 cm, D: 12 cm.
Acc. no. 76.1234.

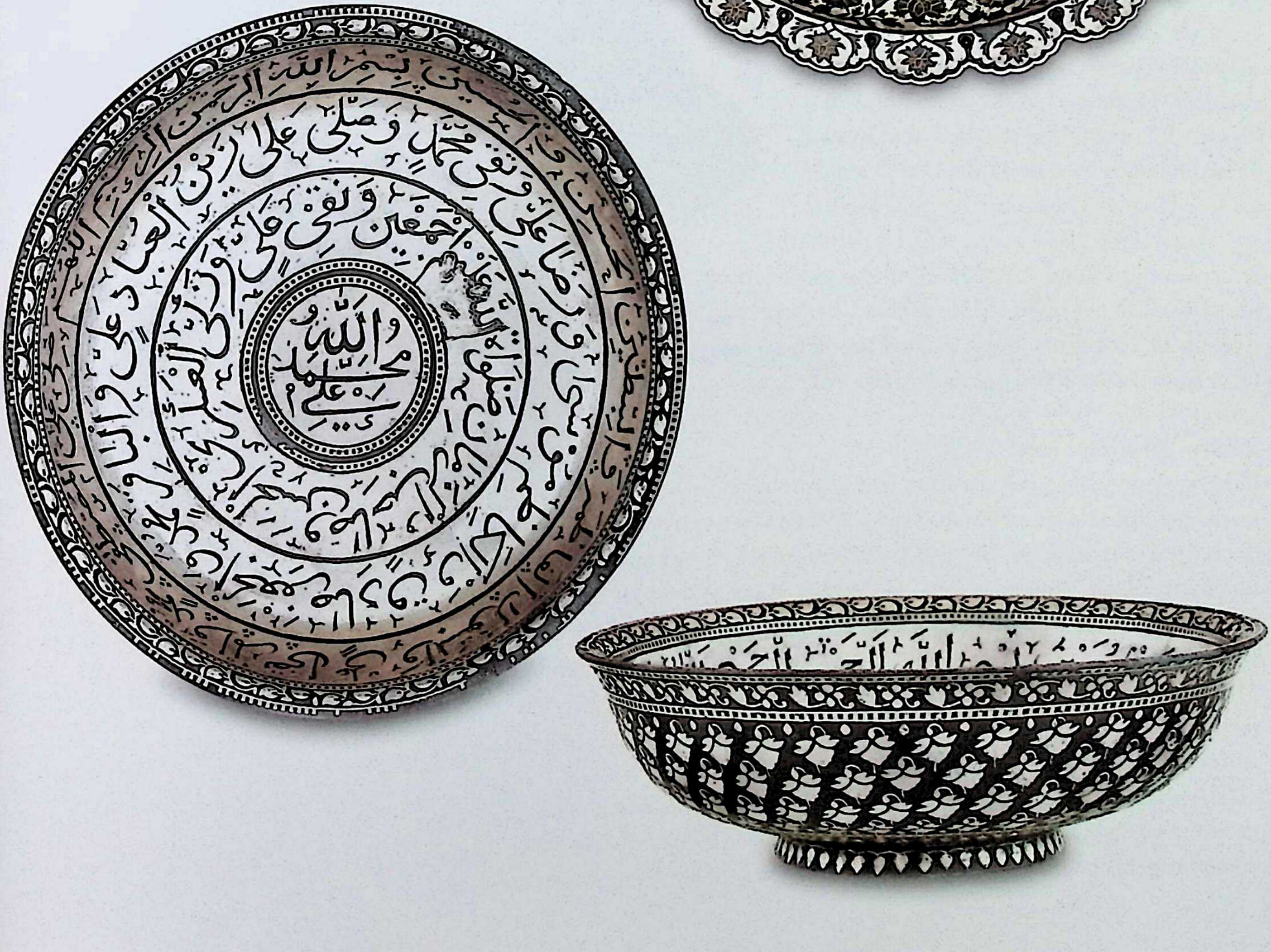
**11**
Circular box with fluted straight sides, lid missing, Deccan, Bidar, late 17th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; H: 5 cm, D: 14 cm. Acc. no. 76.1232.

**12**
Plate, Deccan, Bidar, second half of the 17th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; D: 30.4 cm. Acc. no. 76.1229.



**13**
Plate, Deccan, Bidar, mid-17th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver and brass; D: 35.5 cm. Acc. no. 76.1227.

**14**
Bowl with Arabic calligraphy, Deccan, Bidar, mid-18th century. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 4.7 cm, D: 14.8 cm. Acc. no. 76.1241.



### Other Centres of Bidri Ware

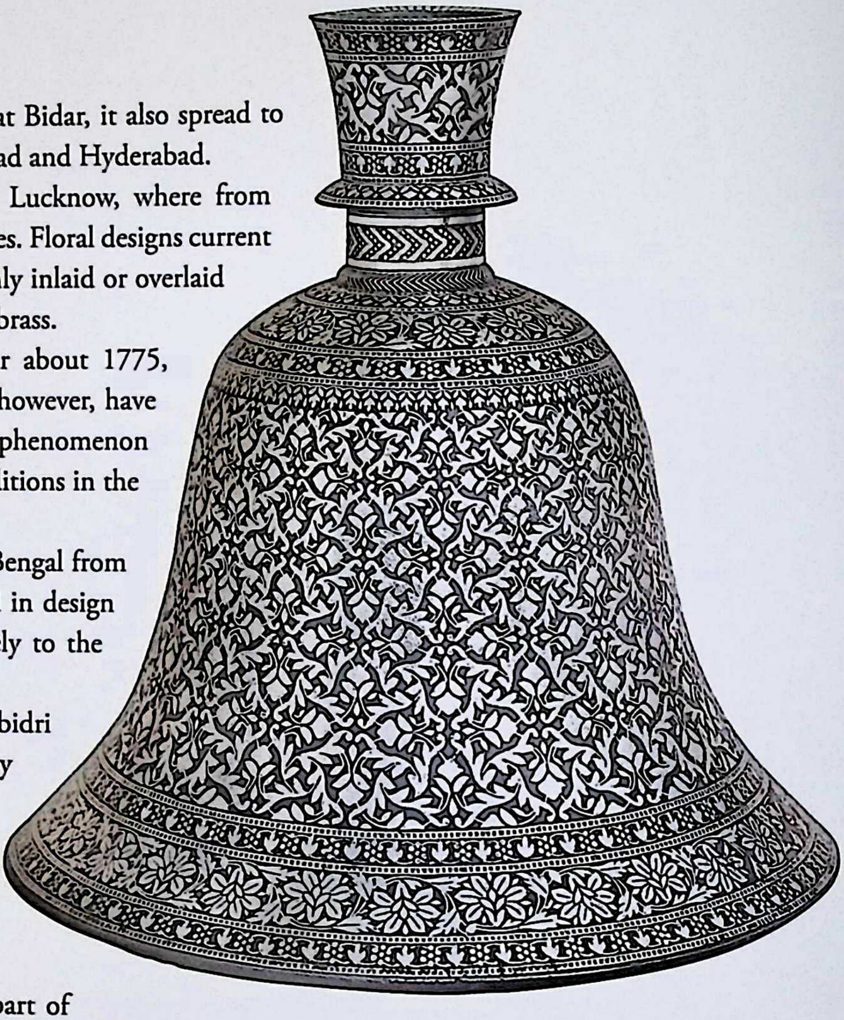
While the bidri industry was centred principally at Bidar, it also spread to other places, chiefly Lucknow, Purnea, Murshidabad and Hyderabad.

Zarbuland (high-relief) work is common at Lucknow, where from about 1770 a favourite design was animals in jungles. Floral designs current in Lucknow had large-scale motifs, and were mainly inlaid or overlaid in silver alone, but occasionally in both silver and brass.

Bidri work started in Purnea in north Bihar about 1775, with mostly conventional designs. Some objects, however, have motifs that are partially Chinese in nature, a phenomenon probably explained by the influence of artistic traditions in the neighbouring states of Nepal and Sikkim.

Bidri work from Murshidabad, the capital of Bengal from the early 18th century until British times, is bold in design and has notably thin silver inlay. It catered largely to the local markets.

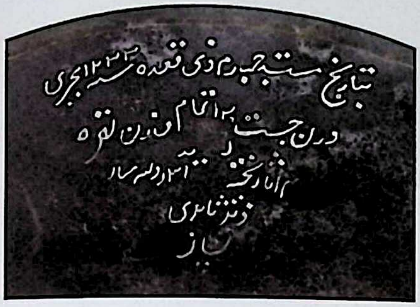
Hyderabad and Bidar are the only places where bidri objects are produced today. Bidri work probably started in Hyderabad in the early 19th century (figures 15a and b), a tradition documented by two fine-quality hookah-bases in JKMMIA made in Hyderabad by an artist named Malappa and dated 1859 (figures 3a and b). With the States Reorganization Act, 1956, Bidar became part of Karnataka and Hyderabad the capital of Andhra Pradesh (and more recently, of Telangana). These geopolitical changes spurred more bidri craftsmen to move from Bidar to the larger city of Hyderabad.



### Modern Developments

Bidri work drew renewed attention from connoisseurs of Indian art in 1982, when several examples of this craft were displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the Festival of India in the UK, and in 1985, when they were featured in exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This international exposure confirmed the distinctiveness and significance of bidri ware as a form of art. Scholarly publications on bidri ware by Susan Stronge (1985), Mark Zebrowski (1997), Krishna Lal (1990), and the present author (2011) have further raised the prestige of this craft and fostered interest among many art collectors and museums.

Over the last 60 years, the shapes, designs and workmanship of bidri ware have deteriorated in quality. Most pieces are now inlaid in tarkasi work, and designs consist largely of crosses, stars, geometric shapes and floral motifs. Recent bidris lack



**15a and b**
Bell-shaped hookah-base (Farshi hookah) with inscription on inner surface, Deccan, Hyderabad, dated September 1818. Bidri, inlaid with silver; H: 25 cm, D: 23.5 cm. Acc. no. 76.1265.

the elegant proportions in form, variety in design, and precision in workmanship that were hallmarks of early Bidar works. Present-day bidri ware is made mostly for tourists, non-resident Indians, and clients in West Asia. It consists of cigarette-boxes, ashtrays, small plates, vases, bowls, table lamps, surahis (long-necked pots), plates with Quranic inscriptions, paper clips, tie pins, necklaces, bracelets, buttons, cufflinks and some minor objects for home decor. A further debasement is seen in the recent production of such display items as plaques for wall-decoration that feature dancers, the landmark monument of the Charminar, and portraits of some national leaders.

Local cooperative societies and private retailers handle the trade in bidri. The All India Handicrafts and Handloom Board, and the Governments of Telangana and Karnataka are trying to promote bidri work at Bidar and Hyderabad. Artisans have formed cooperative societies, and some private manufacturers have attempted to improve this work and working conditions. Moreover, some designers are engaged in revolutionizing the designs and shapes of bidri for the contemporary market. In November 2006, the Government of India gave bidri a GI (geographical indication) tag—an Intellectual Property Rights measure under the World Trade Organization—which will maintain brand value and prevent cheap replicas of this fascinating craft.

**Acknowledgement**
All images are from the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art (JKMMIA), Hyderabad.

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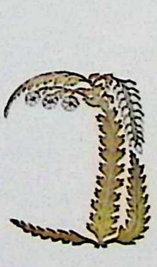

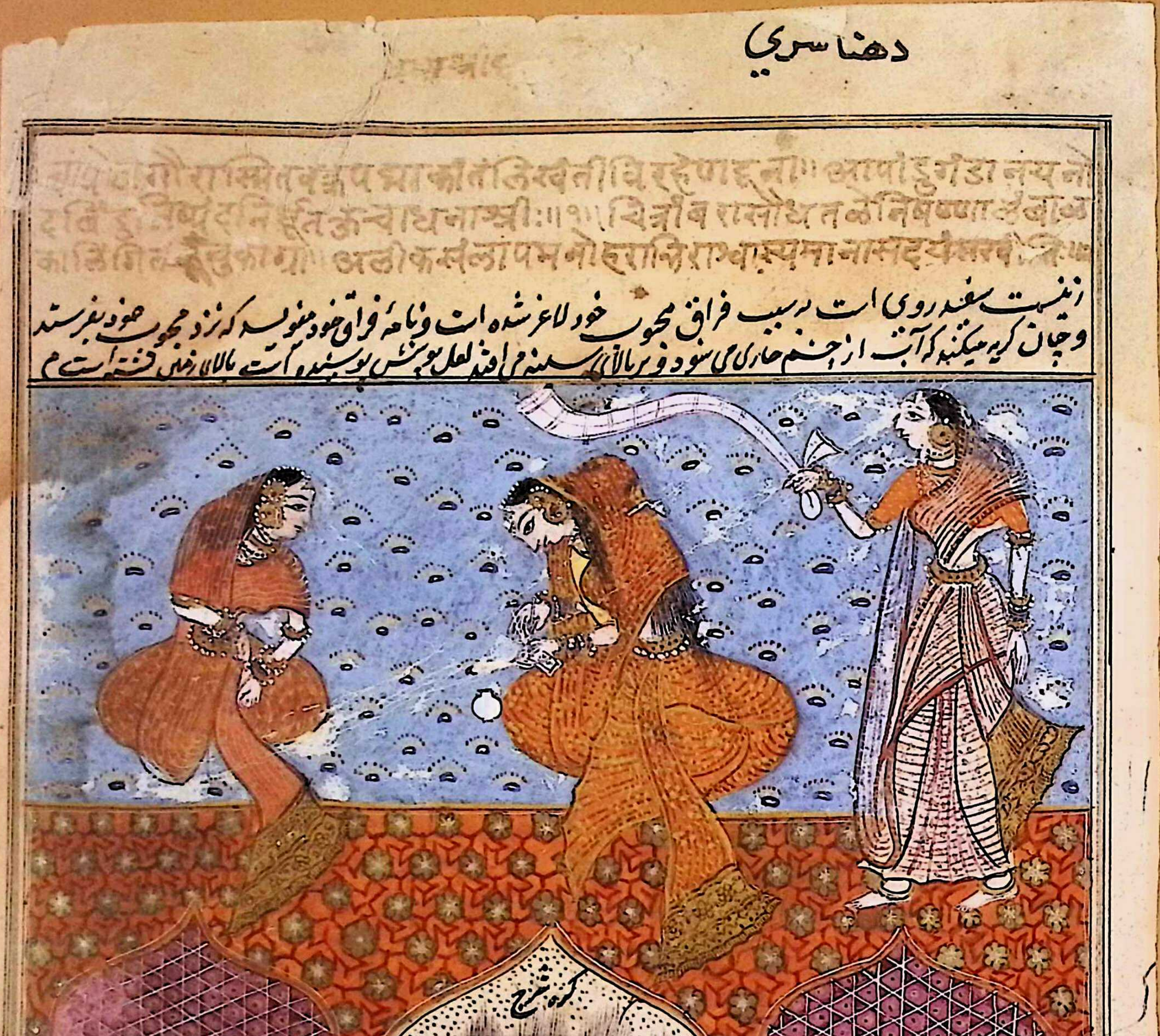
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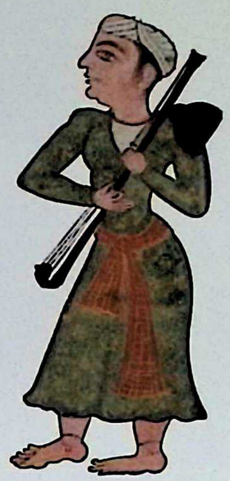


# Music, Art and Power in 'Adil Shahi Bijapur, c. 1570–1630

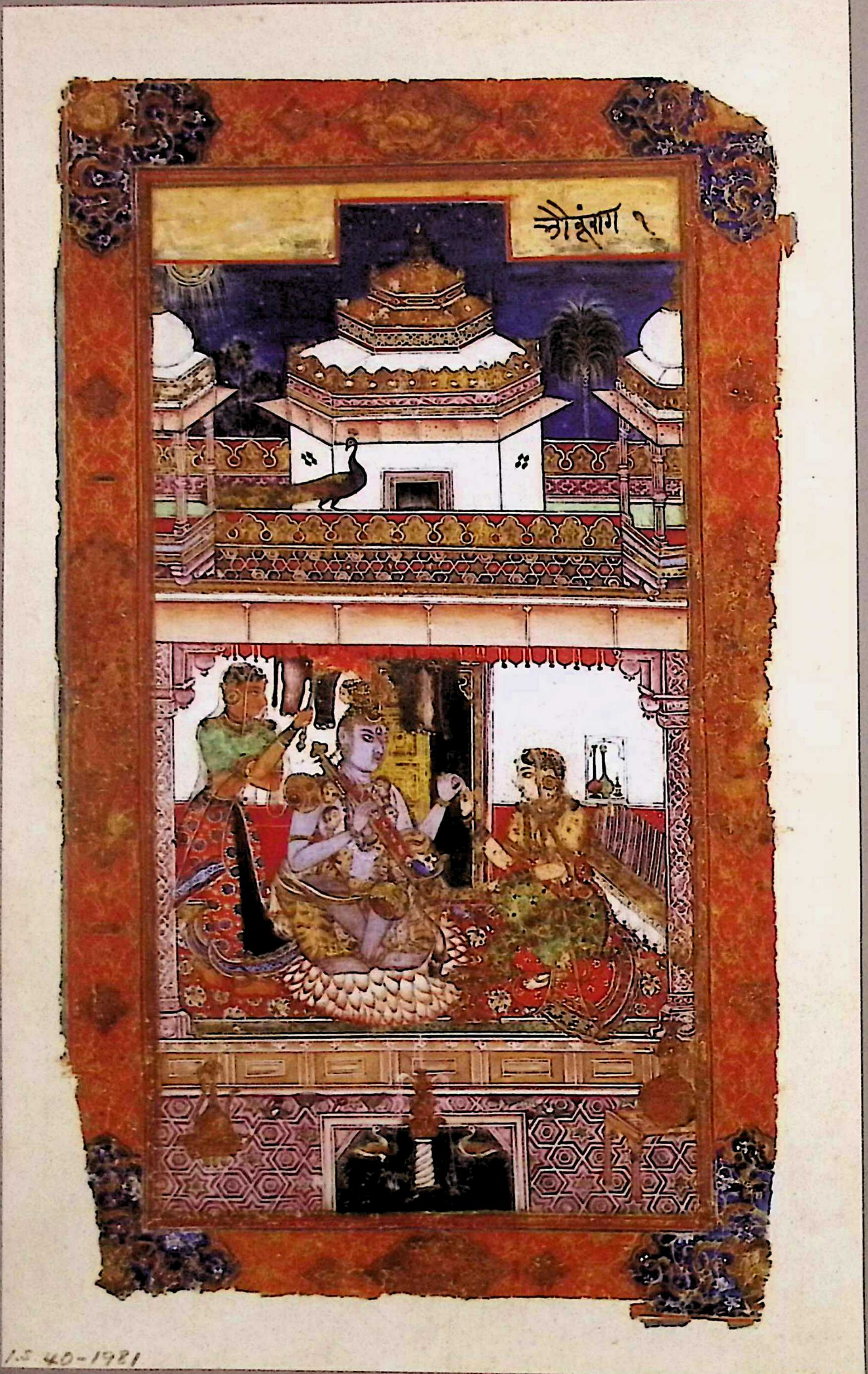
### *Katherine Butler Schofield*

In 1668/69 in Delhi, a minor Mughal functionary by the name of Kamilkhani wrote a treatise on the ragas of Hindustan. The work was prepared for one of Aurangzeb 'Alamgir's favourite officers, Mir 'Abdul Qadir Diyanat Khan, who spent much of his career as Mughal governor of Aurangabad and the Deccan. Kamilkhani's reason for writing was this:

> When I engaged my friends in informal conversation, and they introduced the topic of ragas I...found myself utterly in the dark as to why the people of Hind have specified a time for every raga at which its performance is most pleasing; for example, the fact that Raga Bhairava should be sung in the morning.... I made searching inquiries of scholars, ustads and performers alike, but not one gave a satisfactory answer to this question.... Therefore, I...have spent much time conversing with the singers of raga, the players of instruments, and friends who are connoisseurs of this art; and I have also to a small degree myself learned the practices of singing, composing and instrumental playing. I have thought in depth about...the sciences of astrology and of mathematics; and in this respect the endeavours of previous authors on the sciences of music and astrology, as well as the pronouncements of some of the ascetics and devotees of God, were gifts to this inquirer. The result is this guide, which I have written to explain why the ragas must be sung at their specified times.[1]

Kamilkhani was simply capturing the spirit of his age. The first two decades of the reign of 'Alamgir (1658–1707) saw an explosion of Persian-language treatises written by Mughal connoisseurs, aimed at getting to the bottom of the fascinating subject of the raga.[2] The authors were obsessed with the relationship between the sonic properties of the raga as a framework for composing melodies, and its extramusical powers, embodied in visual and poetical imagery, to awaken specific emotional states in the listener or to change the natural world, if sung at exactly the right time.[3]

1
Ragini Dhanashri, northern Deccan, late 16th century. MJM collection. With additional thanks to Navina Haidar.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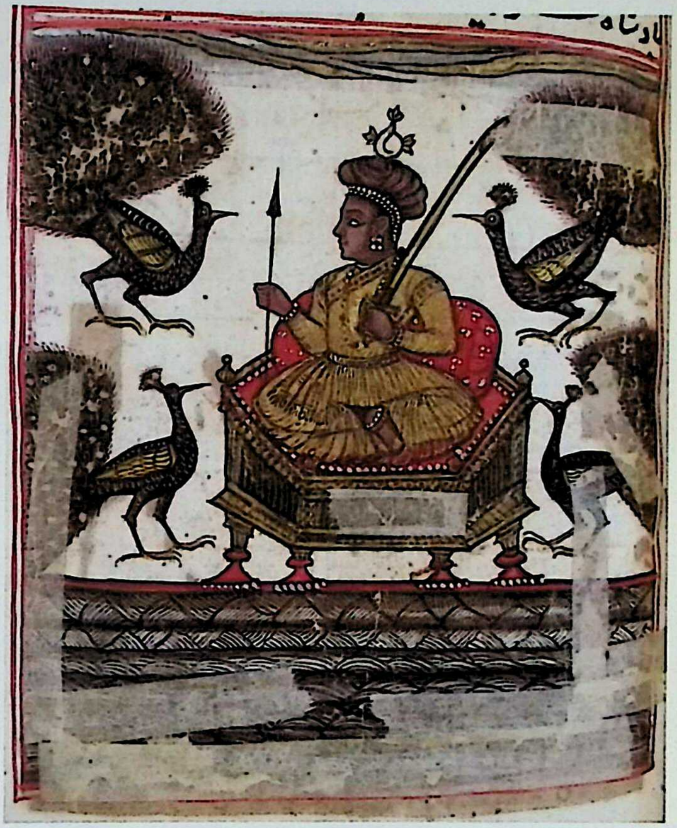


2
Raga Bhairava, from the Chunar *Ragamala*, Bundi, 1591. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.40-1981.

3
Raga Megh, from Qazi Hasan's *Miftah al-Sarud*, Daulatabad, 1663/64 (copy date 1691). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.61-1977, f. 72r.

The 17th-century theorists were not merely determined to establish each raga's "potent effect on the listener" when harnessed correctly—"that is to say, why it is that the gentle singing of the beautiful voice causes dusk to fall, or vengeful snakes to be tamed by melancholy harmonies, or deer to faint dead away from listening to heart-stealing melodies."[4] They were also terrified of the consequences of getting it wrong. Qazi Hasan, writing in Daulatabad in 1664, took musicians of his day to task in the strongest terms for their inauspicious errors:

> When each [of the six principal ragas] is sung in the musical assembly, it must only ever be followed by its own relations, i.e. its own raginis. The treatises state that if a raga is...followed by the wife of another raga, the singer forces the two to commit adultery! However, today's singers do not perform music as it is [set out] in the treatises. Every day they pay lip service to the music of the [great] musicians of the past.... But today's singers don't know the [proper] times of the ragas and raginis at all! [...For example,] Sarang is a ragini of Raga Megh, whose time is [specified] as night. But Sarang is now sung at sunset.... This is an error.... Many other ragas are now sung in a topsy-turvy fashion and their correct times are no longer known. Because of this, God's blessings have fled [the perpetrators'] households.[5]

These Mughal writers were clearly baffled by an apparent disconnect between what they heard and experienced when great musicians performed the ragas in musical assemblies, and the infinitely variable systems of six ragas and multiple raginis they saw in Ragamala paintings and read about in music theory and Ragamala poetry—in other words, between the sounded and visualized forms of the raga.[6]

What was it—what is it still—that has made the raga such a compelling object of contemplation, and at the same time so mysterious in the workings of its multifaceted power? For both powerful and elusive it undoubtedly is. The Ragamala—that perfectly proportioned garland of 36 ragas and raginis dressed as deities, joginis, nayakas and nayikas—has been suffused not just with supernatural but with sovereign power since its first flowering in the 14th to 16th centuries.[7] For reasons that will become clear below, from very early on, exquisite Ragamala paintings and poetry, and major works of musicology containing Ragamala chapters were used to consecrate the power of new potentates, large and small (figures 1–3)—from the Mughal emperors Akbar and 'Alamgir to Shah 'Alam II, from Asaf-ud-Daula of Avadh to Sikander Jah of Hyderabad, from the Maratha general Raja Rao Rambha to the Bengali banker Jagat Seth, all the way down to the Empress of India, Queen Victoria, to whom Bengali musicologist S.M. Tagore sent a deluxe lithographic Ragamala on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 1887.[8]

A hundred years after this rash of Mughal raga theory in 'Alamgir's reign, those Europeans who arrived in India to take over what had recently been Mughal territory found the intense and complex power of the raga similarly compelling—and equally baffling. What famous scholars and collectors like William Jones and Richard Johnson tried—and failed—to do was crack the code of correlations between (1) Ragamala paintings and poetical descriptions; (2) the raga as a purely sonic entity; (3) the time theory of the raga; and (4) each raga's emotional power (see figure 12).[9] And despite scholars having expended a great deal of energy on the question in the centuries since, the relationship between Ragamala paintings and their melodic inspiration remains unclear.[10]

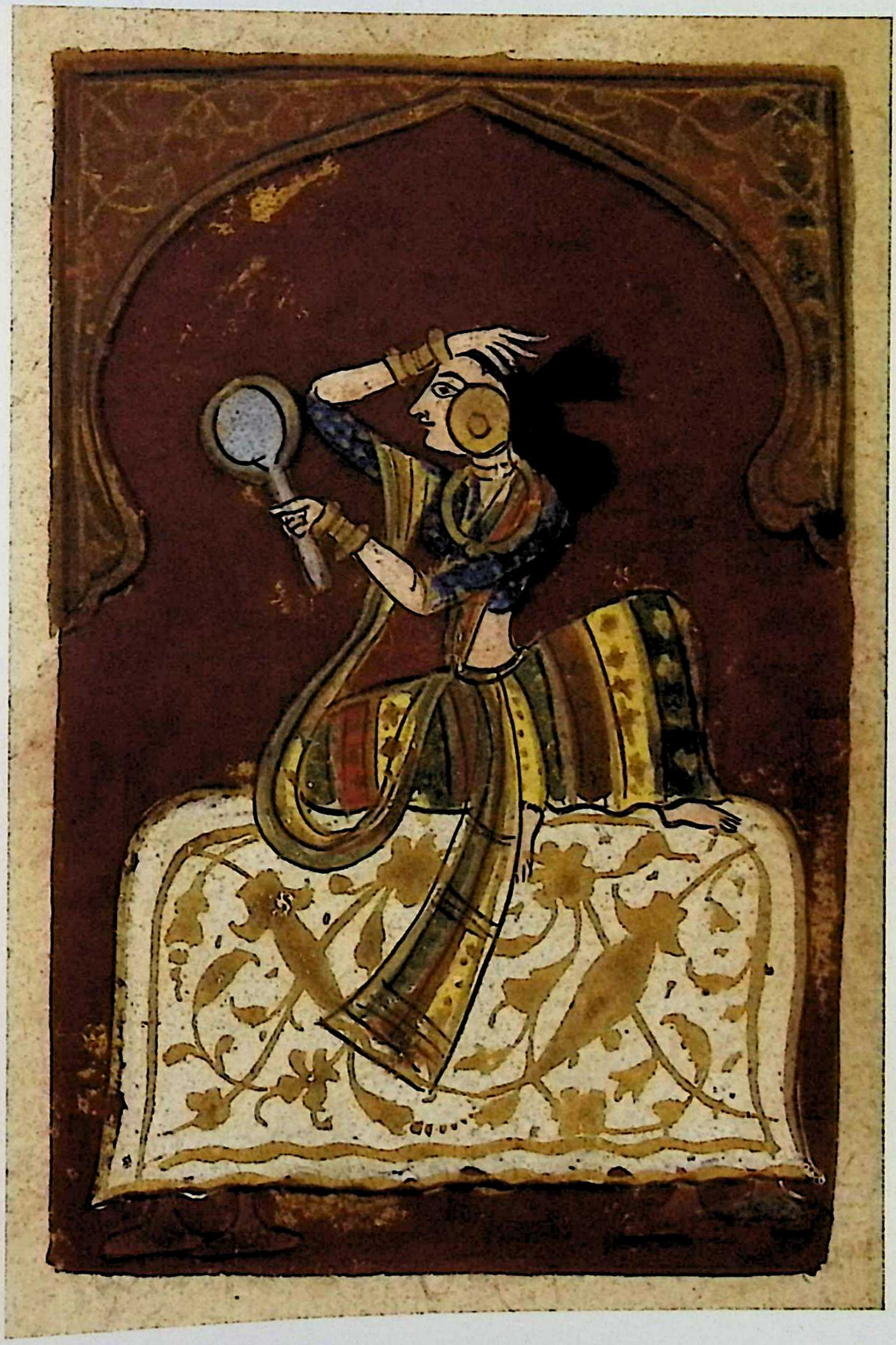
This is because there *is* no one-to-one correlation between brushstroke and glissando, pigment and note; between the sonic and iconic forms of the raga. From the beginning, Ragamala paintings were often framed with verses evoking the raga icons, but generally they floated free from the music-theoretical tradition embodied in written treatises. For their part, the Sanskrit, Persian and vernacular music treatises of the early-modern period[11] were overwhelmingly concerned with the sonic properties of ragas, and not their visual forms. Even when the writers did present iconic descriptions (dhyanas or surats) in Ragamala format, these were by and large never intended to be illustrated.[12] Although the iconic and the sonic form of a particular raga are supposed to evoke the same affective response in the audience, with one theoretically supposed to call the other to mind in the moment of aesthetic enjoyment, Ragamala paintings and raga musicology have historically constituted separate material traditions.[13]

A handful of early-modern music treatises exist, however, that deliberately incorporated and responded textually to painted illustrations of the ragas and raginis. Many of these rare illustrated music treatises are associated with the Deccan. They are interesting precisely because in operating as a whole package they enable us to analyse the mechanics of the relationship between musical sound; visual, poetic and mental image; and emotional, visceral and supernatural power.

On studying these illustrated texts, it becomes apparent that sonic form and visual/poetic icon shared certain *conceptions of power*, on overt and esoteric levels.

On the overt level, sound and image both had *affective power* (i.e. emotional and visceral power), embodied in:

- the aesthetic notions of rasa and bhava,
- techniques to exert that power specific to each medium, but which multiplied in efficacy when sound and image were wielded together, and
- a theory of reception—what impact that power would have on an audience.



4

Ragini Kambhavati, from Shaikh 'Abdul Karim's *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, Bijapur, image c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 117r.

On the esoteric level, sound's affective power was understood to be rooted in *supernatural powers* harnessed through various sciences, particularly:

- astrology,
- humoral medicine and
- magical and tantric rituals involving sound, numbers and the drawing of diagrams.

These were the sciences that were used throughout South Asia to underpin sovereign power, for it was believed that their correct use allowed kings to control their territories, subjects and even the natural world.[14] Hence the enduring connection between ragas and kingship.

To explore the conjunction of music, art and power in the early-modern raga, I will look more closely at one of these illustrated music treatises: Shaikh 'Abdul Karim's *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi* ("Jewels/Essences of Music belonging to Muhammad").[15] This work was written in Persian for Muhammad 'Adil Shah, ruler of Bijapur (r. 1627–56), but incorporates illustrations from a Dakhni music treatise composed c. 1570, probably for 'Ali 'Adil Shah I (r. 1558–80) (figure 4). I will place this work in dialogue with the Chester Beatty *Nujum al-'Ulum* ("Stars of Science"), written by 'Ali 'Adil Shah himself, whose paintings are used to date the *Javahir*'s illustrations, and will use the two texts to think through early-modern understandings of the ragas' fundamental powers—emotional, visceral and supernatural—as musicological knowledge circulated between Bijapur and the Mughal Deccan.

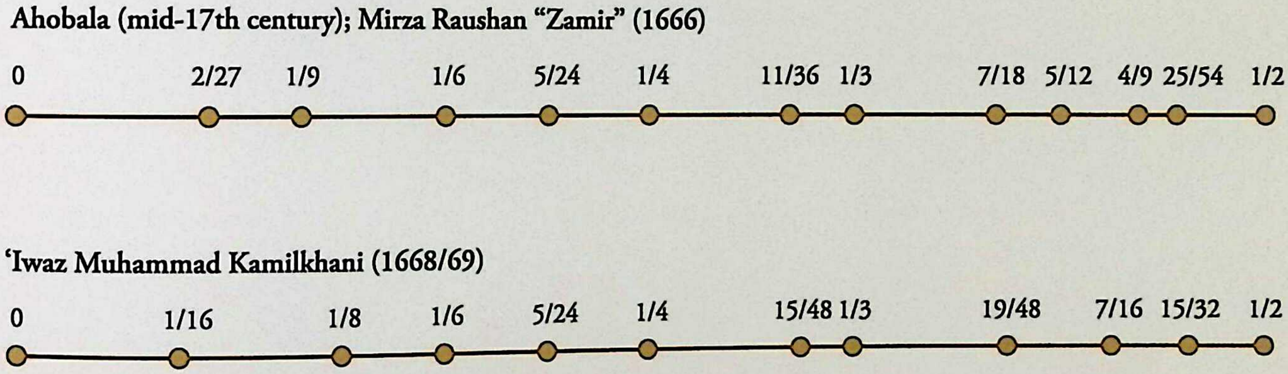
The *Javahir* is key in trying to unpick the possible impact of musical thought in 'Adil Shahi Bijapur on later Mughal efforts to systematize Hindustani music in the 1660s–70s. It is important for several reasons,[16] but here I will just consider its significance as the first treatise to make explicit the source of the ragas' affective powers in astrology. According to this theory, each of the seven celestial bodies visible to the naked eye dictated the element that ruled the seven fundamental notes (svaras) of the Indian scale. Each raga's two most emphasized notes (vadi and samvadi) determined whether that raga was dominated by fire, water, air or earth—and thus, what effect it had on the emotional state of the listener, the health of the body politic, or the state of the natural world. This scientific explanation for the ragas' powers was adopted in the Mughal North, and elaborated mathematically in Ahobala's key 17th-century Sanskrit *Sangitaparijata* and in the major canonical Persian treatises of 'Alamgir's reign.[17]

The *Javahir* is a palimpsest of three treatises. The first is the *Sangitaratnakara*, a major 13th-century Sanskrit treatise written by Sharngadeva at the Yadava court in Devagiri (Daulatabad). Around 1570, in the reign of 'Ali 'Adil Shah I, a translation was made of this seminal text into the local Bijapuri vernacular, Dakhni. Unlike the original, the central raga chapter of this Dakhni work took the form of a newfangled and densely illustrated Ragamala, with paintings for every raga and ragini. Then, circa 1630, Shaikh 'Abdul Karim split the Dakhni manuscript apart and reused its paintings in a more elaborate Persian translation dedicated to Muhammad 'Adil Shah.[18]

The *Javahir* is particularly important to Indian music history because of its systematic integration of Islamicate scientific ideas about the power of sound and its effects in human affairs into a work of Indic musicology. 'Abdul Karim freely mixed Hindu and Muslim theories of supernatural power that pertained both to music and to courtly ideologies of rule. Notably, his Persian reframing of the earlier Dakhni raga images overtly retains Indic links with esoteric and especially astral power, but reinterprets them in Islamicate terms. Critically important is his attribution of the origins of the svaras both to the dance of Mahadev (discussed later) and to the sound of Allah's voice in creating first the seven celestial bodies and then the seven svaras by reciting the words "kun faya kun" (Be and it is).[19]

'Abdul Karim's explanation of the ragas' powers derives from the Pythagorean concept of the music of the spheres, which he draws upon to explain powerful links between celestial bodies and the svaras, and the 12 houses of the zodiac and the 12

## Table: The Connection Between Celestial Bodies and Musical Notes


Ahobala (mid-17th century); Mirza Raushan "Zamir" (1666)
0
2/27
1/9
1/6
5/24
1/4
11/36
1/3
7/18
5/12
4/9
25/54
1/2
'Iwaz Muhammad Kamilkhani (1668/69)
0
1/16
1/8
1/6
5/24
1/4
15/48
1/3
19/48
7/16
15/32
1/2

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sa | Re | Re | Ga | Ga | Ma | Ṁa | Pa | Dha | | Ni | Ni | Sa |
| Open | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Moon | Mercury | | Venus | | Mars | | Sun | Jupiter | | Saturn*† | | |
| Water | Fire | | Earth | | Fire | | Water | Earth | | Air* | | |
| visal | 'ishq | | 'irfan | | 'ishq | | visal | 'irfan | | firaq** | | |
| Brahmin | Rajput | | Merchant | | Rajput | | Brahmin | Merchant | | Scribe*‡ | | |
| hasya | shringara | | hasya | | shringara | | bhayanak | bibhatsa | | karuna‡ | | |

* Ras Baras Khan (1698)
** Shaikh 'Abdul Karim (c. 1630)
† Kamilkhani (1668/69)
‡ Ahobala/Zamir (1666)

Re = Komal svara
Ṁa = tivra svara

positions svaras can take on the strings of a musical instrument (Table).[20] Arabic and Persian writers inherited much of their music theory directly from Greek mathematical sciences. Pythagoras' theory of the music of the spheres, expanded by Plato, states that the same mathematical proportions audible as musical harmony—seven principal notes of the scale, 12 acoustical positions for those notes in the octave—underpinned the inaudible but equally harmonious movement of the seven celestial bodies through the 12 houses of the zodiac, thus tethering music's power to astrology.[21] It is not incidental that the 15th-century Iranian intellectual Jalaluddin Dawwani inserted the Pythagorean method of tuning the seven notes into his seminal thesis on the ethics of kingship, the *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, as mathematical proof of the superiority of the virtue of ʻadalat (justice).[22] This work was used across early-modern India for the training of administrators,[23] and by the mid-16th century Pythagorean tuning had also become naturalized in Indian music theory in Sanskrit and Persian.[24]

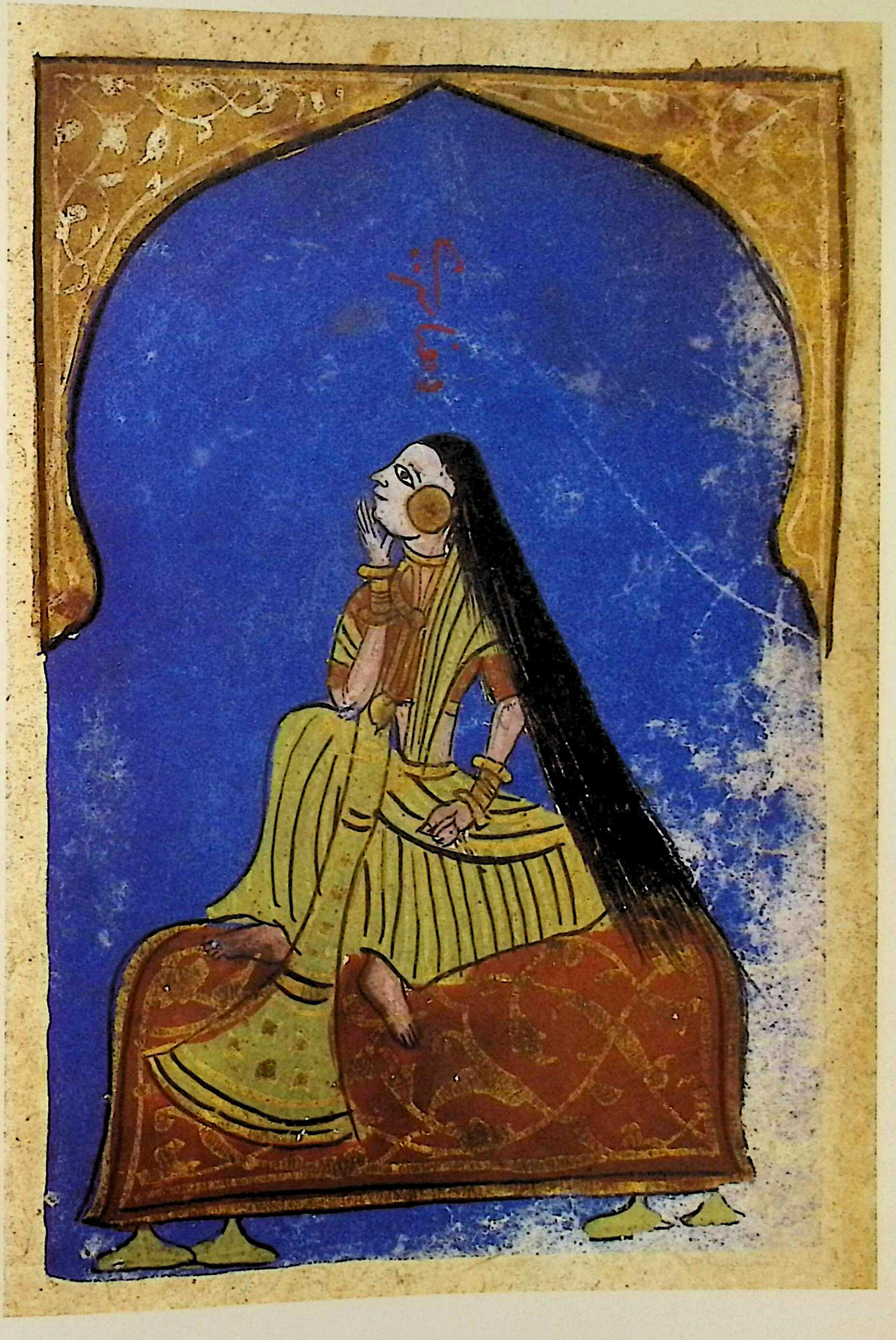
This astrological connection between *svaras* and celestial bodies underpins ʻAbdul Karim's systematic incorporation of the Indian ragas into the Greco-Islamicate system of humoral medicine, Unani tibb.[25] He attributes the essential emotional flavour—in Sanskrit terms the rasa—of every raga to the dominance of one of the four elements of Islamicate natural sciences: fire, earth, air and water.[26] He furthermore describes the effect of each of the four kinds of raga in terms borrowed from Sufi teaching and akhlaq (ethical) literature: fiery ragas ignite passionate love (ʻishq) in the listener's heart; earthy ragas enlighten the listener with the mystical knowledge of their true selves (ʻirfan); airy ragas overwhelm the listener with longing for the absent beloved (firaq); and watery ragas annihilate the listener in union with the great Existence (visal).[27]

How did ʻAbdul Karim relate this scheme to the Ragamala illustrations he was responding to? The iconography of Ragamala paintings is supposed to intensify and enrich the sonic forms' affective associations through visual and imaginative means. In 1570, the classic iconography that we recognize today was clearly not yet settled.[28] In the *Javahir*, Ragini Dhanashri, for instance, is not depicted in her now customary form: a woman gazing with longing at a portrait of her absent beloved (figure 1). But the mood of absence (viraha) is nonetheless sustained pictorially by Dhanashri's loose dishevelled hair, her chin resting disconsolately on her hand as she sits on a bed waiting for her lover's return (figure 5). And ʻAbdul Karim makes her essential affective power explicit in the Persian text: Dhanashri is an airy ragini, and thus listening to her overwhelms the listener with longing (firaq).[29]

But to understand his theory on a deeper cultural level, it is critical to embed it in earlier, Shaivite and tantric understandings of the power of sound and how it might be exerted in the service of the sultans of Bijapur. Although the 17th-century explanatory frame of the Ragamala merges Indic raga and Persianate humoral theories, the illustrations are from the 16th century and are formally closely related to the esoteric icons of the *Nujum al-ʻUlum*, written in 1570 by Sultan ʻAli ʻAdil Shah I.[30]

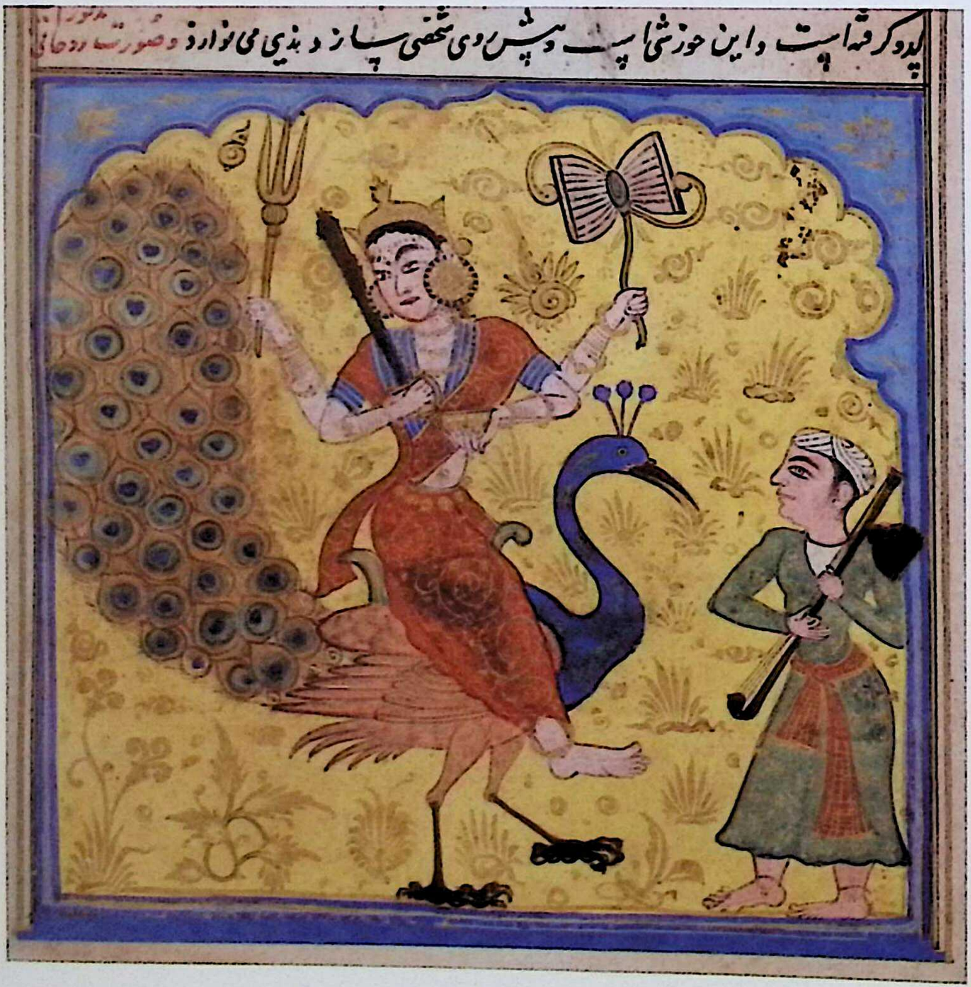
The dating of the Dakhni portions of the *Javahir* is based on the close similarity of its paintings to those of the *Nujum*, a major work of astral magic with around 400

**5**
Ragini Dhanashri, from Shaikh ʻAbdul Karim's *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, Bijapur, image c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 100r.



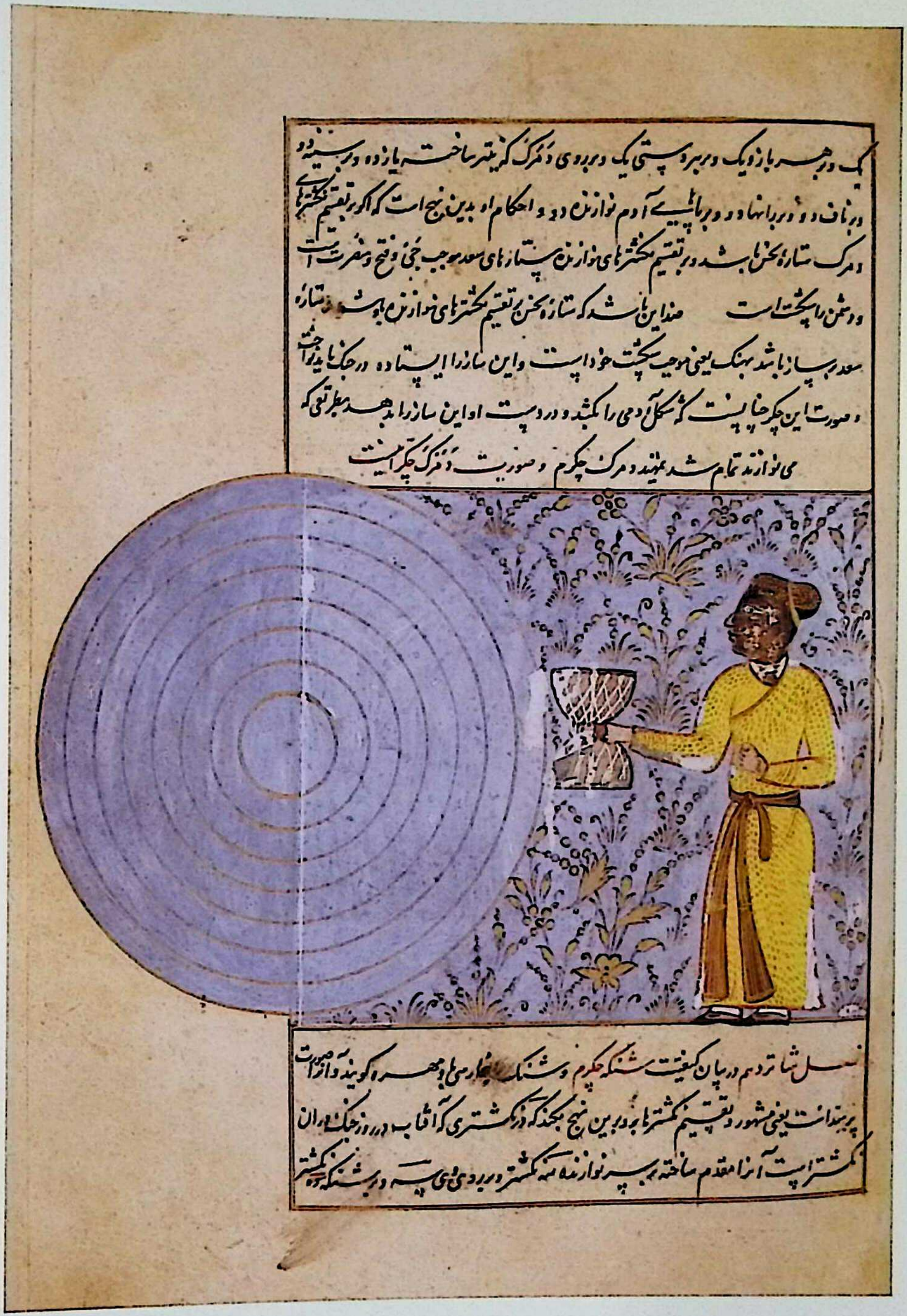
spectacular illustrations that “depict a dazzling variety of angels, anthropomorphized planets, zodiac signs and degrees, talismans, magical spells, astrological tables and horoscopes, tantric goddesses, horses, elephants, and weapons”. The *Nujum* was supposed to include a whole chapter on Indian music, now lost or never completed. However it does have images of a series of musical instruments discussed as ritual objects in the chapter on chakrams (figures 6 and 7), astrological diagrams “drawn to determine the effect of the heavens on a particular ritually important object or... specific action”.[31]

The *Nujum*'s painting of the damaruk chakram (figure 7) is key to our discussion, with its seven concentric circles (seven for the celestial bodies, perhaps; and the circles also signifying waves of sound?) radiating out from the innermost circle that represents the drum-head of the ritually powerful drum, the damaru.[32] The damaru is a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum, played by shaking it to allow two weighted pellets on the ends of cords to strike the drum-heads (as seen in figure 6). It has been used across South Asia in many different ritual contexts for centuries, and is particularly associated with Lord Shiva in his incarnation as Nataraja. The *Javahir*, as do many other Indo-Persian musical writings, explicitly attributes the creation of the svaras to the beautiful singing voice, instrumental playing, and dancing of Mahadev (Shiva)



**6**
Mayur-Vahani, the 62nd chakram from 'Ali 'Adil Shah I's *Nujum al-'Ulum*, Bijapur, 1570. © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, IN 02, f. 271v.

7
Damaru, the 15th chakram from 'Ali 'Adil Shah I's *Nujum al-'Ulum*, Bijapur, 1570. © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, IN 02, f. 213r.



in the cosmic dance of creation.[33] The damaru also has tantric significance, especially in Tibetan Buddhism.[34] Some of the drum's tantric associations are at work in the *Nujum*'s description of the tantric goddess Mayur-Vahani of the 62nd chakram:

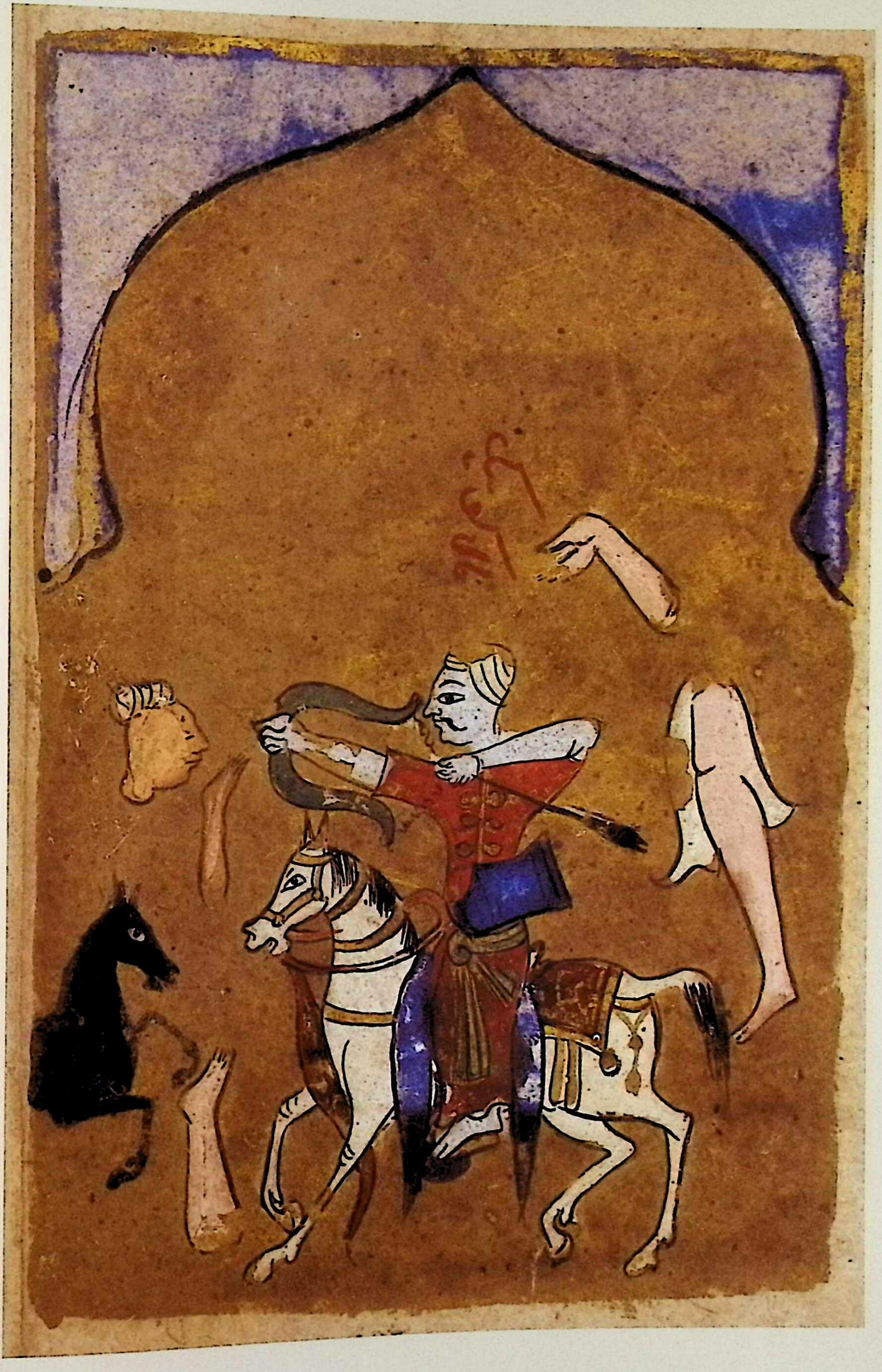
> The form of the aforementioned earth spirit (*ruhani-yi zamin*) is this. She is feminine, has four arms, and rides a peacock. In her two right hands she holds weapons, the sword and the trishul (Shaivite trident). As for her two left hands, in one she holds the damaru and in the other a bowl constructed from a gourd. She is as resplendent as the sun, and an instrumentalist plays before her.[35]

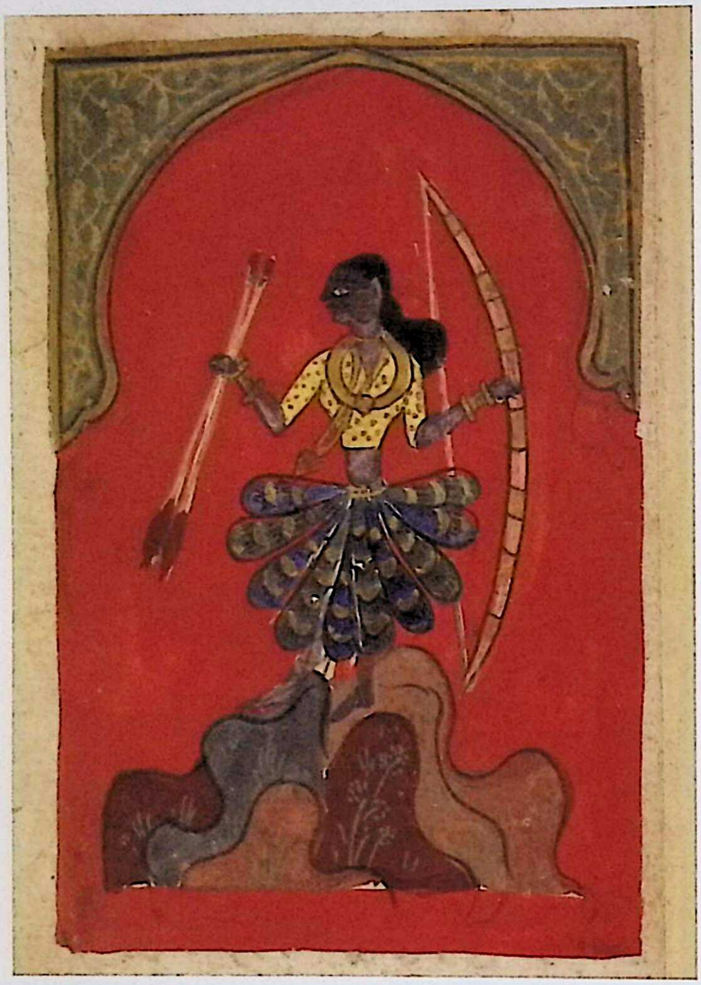
The damaru itself is the 15th chakram. The damaruk chakram appears halfway through a series of chakrams for musical instruments, nearly all of which belong to the naubat ensemble, the West Asian military band (with nine types of instruments) that was imbued with sovereign power throughout the Indian Ocean. The kettledrum in particular was an element of Indian sovereign regalia; a symbol of royal authority, it could only be played on the orders of the monarch (or bestowed by him on a subordinate as a sign of blessing), and was considered to contain intense supernatural power associated with sovereignty.[36] It is no surprise to find the instruments of the naubat ensemble amongst the chakrams. But the damaru, though its primary use here was in war in the service of the king, was not part of the naubat ensemble. Instead, its use was magical.

According to the text,[37] the damaru was wielded by ash-covered mendicants who had lost or renounced caste. In times of war, their role was to pay attention to the army of the enemy, scatter ashes on the battlefield, call upon jinns, spirits, and the celestial bodies (navagraha), and to play the damaru at the exact time determined by the lunar mansion (nakshatra) of the day of battle. If played in accordance with the day's nakshatra, the damaru would render the enemy powerless. Certain astrologer communities (joshis) were also called upon to play the damaru throughout the battle. The drum-heads were made of goat or sheep skin, and the two pellets tied around the waist of the instrument were carved with engravings of the planets. In order for the drum's magic to work, the performer had to take a pair of compasses and draw a circle with the same circumference as the drum-head, and write the enemy's name in the centre. Around the outer edge, he would write esoteric letters of fire. Then he would draw seven concentric circles around the inner circle and in each circle write invocations to the tantric goddesses. On the day of battle, he would strike up the damaru while naming the enemy and reciting this mantra: "Oh my lord enemy, you wish to destroy me. From where I stand, here on the battlefield, I tell you: Go! Go! Stay fixed in place like a statue." For as long as the performer played the damaru and recited, the army would be protected, the enemy soldiers would be scattered and victory would be assured. It was very important, however, that this ritual be performed in proper alignment with the nakshatras. If the configuration of the stars in the nakshatra of the damaru was unlucky, but that associated with the player was auspicious, then victory would still be guaranteed. However, if the stars associated with the player were inauspicious, even if those associated with the damaru were good, defeat was certain.

It is interesting to rethink the raga images from the *Javahir* in the context of the *Nujum*'s explicit ritual representation in the damaruk chakram of diagrams/icons associated with musical sound, ritual incantation, and the outcaste or low-caste musician-astrologer, accompanied by the sung and danced performance of those diagrams through the playing of the drum and the incantation of magical formulae, all of which had to be done at exactly the right time according to precise astrological calculations that were embodied in the ritual objects of instrument, player and diagram/icon, in order for the diagram/icon and the performance to be effective, and victory in battle thereby assured.

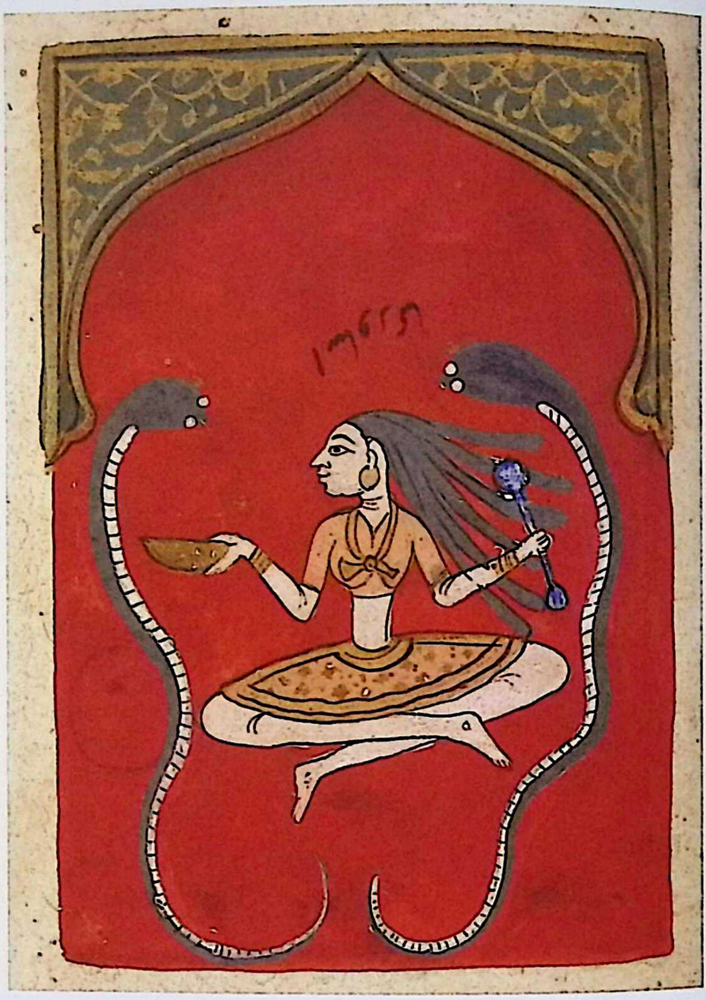
**8**
Raga Malkauns, from Shaikh 'Abdul Karim's *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, Bijapur, image c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 98v.





**9**

Ragini Gond-kri, from Shaikh ‘Abdul Karim’s *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, Bijapur, image c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 110r.



**10**

Ragini Asavari, from Shaikh ‘Abdul Karim’s *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, Bijapur, image c. 1570. © The British Library Board, Or. 12857, f. 102r.

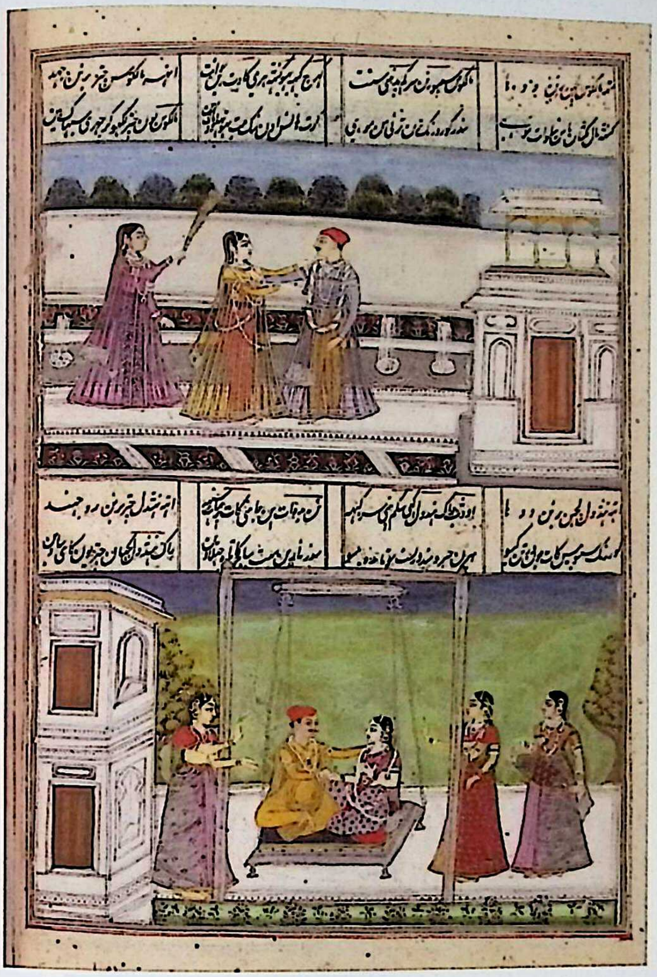
Take three raga-ragini images from the *Javahir*, for instance. The first is Raga Malkauns (figure 8), who in the *Javahir* is classified as a night-time raga dominated by fire and evoking the heroic (vira) rasa. He is painted as a king victorious in battle, untouched and untired, surrounded by the severed limbs of his enemies.[38] The others are wives of Malkauns: Gond-kri and Asavari (figures 9 and 10). Gond-kri is a dark-skinned Gond woman wearing a skirt of peacock feathers, standing on a rocky outcrop and wielding a bow and arrows. Asavari is a jogini or tantric goddess,[39] floating crosslegged holding a gourd bowl and sceptre, with which she is controlling enormous snakes. Both raginis are depicted against a bright red ground. What is absolutely striking, in viewing these raga images alongside the damaruk chakram, is a visceral sense of these paintings’ tantric power.

In the *Javahir*, ‘Abdul Karim recruited the ragas, with their rich aesthetic, emotional and otherworldly powers, to the service of Sufi devotion, and appropriated them as medicinal and supernatural formulae. He thus gave impeccable grounds for a Muslim ruler like Muhammad ‘Adil Shah to use the awesome power of the ragas to regulate and maintain order in the body politic.[40] It is critical to note that the sheer, raw power of musical sound in its Indic ritual context was retained in the Persian reframing, but repurposed for an Islamicate audience in terms they would understand. Further north, the humoral explanation of the ragas' potency became fundamental to the great music treatises written at 'Alamgir's court from the 1660s. It is not a coincidence, I think, that the first full-scale Indian music treatise written in Persian for a Mughal emperor—and the only one illustrated in its time with Ragamala paintings—was written in the Deccan for 'Alamgir by our anxious Qazi Hasan who lamented the errors made by musicians of his time. It was in the musicological works of 'Alamgir's reign that the mechanics of the relationship of stars to humours to svaras to ragas to listeners was specified in precise technical detail, and rendered canonical for future generations of Hindustani aficionados (rasikas).

But that is a story for another day. Instead, I want to return to the question of how the sonic and iconic avatars of the raga connect. It is clear that what links them is rasa and bhava, emotional essences evoked through the different technical means of painting, poetry and music, but felt similarly, and more intensely, when experienced together. But why have we lost the ability to make sense of their relationship?

My suggestion is that the conceptions of power that constituted the shared ground between musical and painted forms of the raga have changed beyond recognition. The source of the ragas' power in astrology, humoral medicine and ritual magic was first clearly articulated in 16th-century Bijapur and then picked up by the Mughal theorists of 'Alamgir's day. But as the 18th century wore on, this knowledge became attenuated and was displaced by subtly different understandings of power. The idea that both painted and musical forms present a specific mood to be experienced as an emotion or tasted as a rasa was retained, even until today. In other words, the understanding that ragas are channels of *affective power* remains. But explicit knowledge that these channels derived their potency from harnessing specific systems of *supernatural power* has gone.

In the case of visual art, as the centre of cultural power and patronage shifted decisively to the Mughal heartlands, the supernatural power tangible in earlier Deccani and Rajput Ragamala paintings began to be displaced by class power. As later connoisseurs placed their emphasis on refined sensibilities, the earlier tantric iconicity of the ragas was diluted by new notions of taste, luxury and beauty, and eventually dissipated (figures 11 and 12). In the case of music, associations with supernatural power were partially retained but weakened into a form of superstition, as detailed technical knowledge of its connections with the medical and esoteric sciences was forgotten. Raga Malkauns may still raise the jinns and Raga Dipak cause fires to break out—but no one now remembers the Dipak that was incorporated into Unani medicine as a raga whose dominant element was fire, and whose hot and dry svaras were used to rebalance the temperament of phlegmatic listeners.



**11**
Raga Malkauns, by Haji Mir Ghulam Hasan, illustration from Khushhal Khan "Anup's" Hindavi *Rag Darshan*, Hyderabad, 1800 (paintings 1804). Lawrence J. Schoenberg Collection, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania. LJS 63, upper half of f. 8v.

پنجم آساوری راگنی از [illegible] صورتش [illegible] رنگش چون نیلم و موی سر را بافته جوده بر سر بسته و کمان ابرو و چشم نیلوفری و از زری و چولی سرخ
رنگ [illegible] جواهرات مرصع بلطافت کمال پوشیده و از مروارید و ماران حمایل کرده ساخته و صندل مالیده در بدن مالیده و [illegible] تمام بدن [illegible] زرد درختان صندل آمده [illegible]
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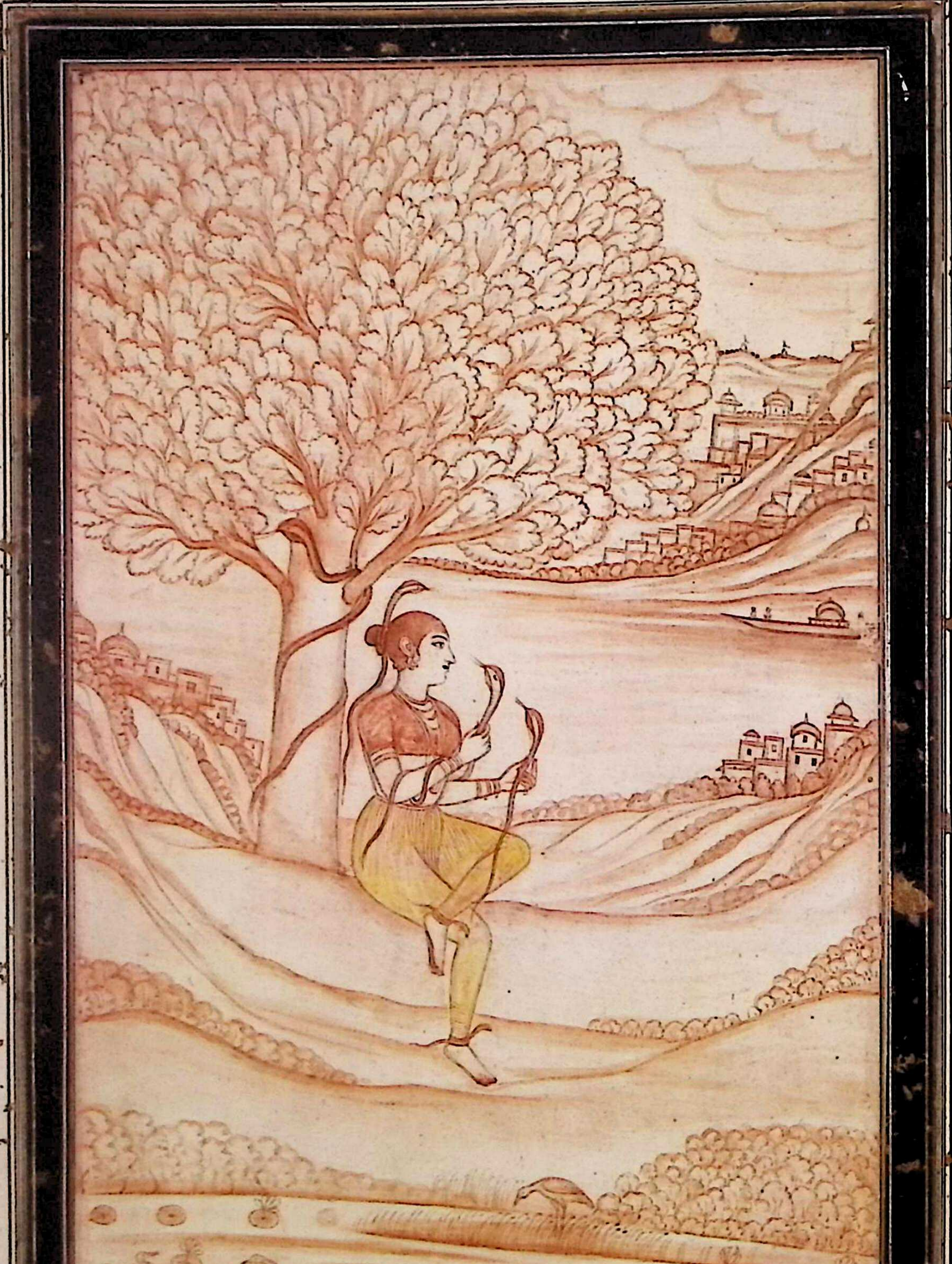

بالای کوه ملیاچل در سایه درختان صندل نشسته است

عمل گوردهن سنگه

7

**12**
Ragini Asavari, by Gobind Singh, illustration for Thakur Das's *Risala-yi Ragmala* (1774), image Avadh, 1780–82. © The British Library Board. Johnson Album, J42,30.

It was this 18th-century attenuation of the scientific underpinning of the ragas' powers that widened the gulf, already observable in Kamilkhani's time, between sonic and iconic forms of the ragas and rendered their erstwhile connections unreadable in the modern era, perhaps irreparably. It is only when we encounter older images, like those of the *Javahir al-Musiqat-i Muhammadi*, and use the texts and contexts in which they flourished to decode their strange and rich meanings, that we are able, in some measure, to rediscover the raga as it once was: a fully-rounded living being with power to change the listening world.

### Acknowledgements

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1 'Iwaz Muhammad Kamilkhani, *Risāla dar 'Amal-i Bīn* [1668/69], Ouseley 158, ff. 123r–132v, Bodleian Library, Oxford, ff. 123r–125r.

2 Aurangzeb did not ban music; Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], "Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of his Reign", *Modern Asian Studies*, 41:1 (2007), pp. 77–120.

3 Katherine Butler Schofield, "Reviving the Golden Age Again: 'Classicization', Hindustani Music, and the Mughals", *Ethnomusicology*, 54:3 (2010), pp. 484–517; Katherine Butler Schofield,

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4 Mirza Raushan "Zamir", *Tarjuma-i Kitāb-i Pārijātak* [1666], Egerton 793, British Library, f. 1v.

5 Qazi Hasan bin Khwaja Tahir, *Miftāḥ al-Sarūd* [1664], Persian Mus. 13, Salar Jung Museum Library, Hyderabad, ff. 12v–13r.

6 Sonic form, *nadamaya*, and iconic form, *devatamaya*, after Somanatha's *Rāgavibodha* (1609); Harold Powers, "Illustrated Inventories of Indian Rāgamālā Painting", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 100:4 (1980), pp. 473–93, see p. 475.

7 Allyn Miner, "Ragas in the Early Sixteenth Century", in Orsini and Schofield, *Tellings and Texts*, pp. 385–406.

8 Kṣemakarṇa, *Rāgamālā* [1570], I O Sanskrit 1516b, British Library; Qazi Hasan bin Khwaja Tahir, *Miftāḥ al-Sarūd* [1664, copy 1691], IS.61:1977, Victoria and Albert Museum; Nawab Mazhar Khan Bahadur, *Khulāsat al-'Aish-i 'Ālam Shāhī* [1798], Ouseley Add. 123, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Ghulam Raza Sabir 'Ali, *Uṣūl al-Naghmāt-i Āṣafī* [1793], Persian Mus. 2, Salar Jung Museum Library, Hyderabad; Khushhal Khan "Anup", Persian *Rāg Darshan* [1808], D515 Persian MSS, University of Madras, and Hindavi *Rāg Darshan* [1800, pictures 1804], LJS 63, University of Pennsylvania Library; Yaśodānanda Śukla "Kavidas", *Rāgamālā* [1758], ed. Jagdiśvar Pandey (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1976); Sourindro Mohun Tagore, *Six Ragas and Thirty-six Raginis of the Hindus* (Calcutta: S.M. Tagore, 1887).

9 William Jones, "On the Musical Modes of the Hindoos", in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online: The Works of Sir William Jones, in Six Volumes; Vol. I.* http://www.galegroup.com (accessed November 29, 2009); Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library* (London: Sotheby Parke and Oxford University Press, 1981); Katherine Butler Schofield, "'Words Without Songs': The Social History of Hindustani Song Collections in India's Muslim Courts c. 1770–1830", in Rachel Harris and Martin Stokes, eds., *Theory and Practice in the Music of the Islamic World: Essays in Honour of Owen Wright* (London: Routledge, 2017).

10 Klaus Ebeling, *Ragamala Painting* (New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1973); though for a new study of how poetry, painting and sound intensify each other in the case of Raga Gaund, see David Lunn and Katherine Butler Schofield, "Delight, Devotion, and the Music of the Monsoon at the Court of Emperor Shah 'Alam II", in Imke Rajamani, Margrit Pernau and Katherine Butler Schofield, *Monsoon Feelings: A History of Emotions in the Rain* (New Delhi: Niyogi, 2018).

11 The years c. 1400–1800 are now generally called the early-modern period in global history; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On Early Modern Historiography", in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 425–45.

12 See, for example, William Jones' own heavily annotated copy of the *Tuḥfat al-Hind* [c. 1675, copy 1768]; RSPA 78, British Library.

13 Powers, "Illustrated Inventories", pp. 474–75.

14 See further A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 42:1 (1999), pp. 47–93; Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Katherine Butler Schofield, "Musical Culture under Mughal Patronage: The Place of Pleasure", in Richard Eaton and Ramya Sreenivasan, eds., *Oxford Handbook to the Mughal Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

15 Or. 12857, British Library, available to view online; Katherine Butler Schofield, "Indian Music in the Persian Collections: The *Javāhir al-Mūsīqāt-i Muḥammadī*", 2 parts, British Library Asian and African

Studies blog (October 2014), http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/2014/10/indian-music-in-the-persian-collections-the-javahir-al-musiqat-i-muhammadi-or12857-part-1.html and -part-2.html (accessed May 10, 2017).

16 See Schofield, "Indian Music", parts 1 and 2.

17 Notably the masterful translation of Ahobala by Mirza Raushan "Zamir", the *Tarjuma-i Kitāb-i Pārījātak* (1666); Kamilkhani's *Risāla dar 'Amal-i Bīn* (1668/69); Hajji Husain Zahri Isfahani's *Risāla dar Fann-i Mūsīqī* (late 17th century); and Ras Baras Khan's *Shams al-Aṣwāt* (1698).

18 Schofield, "Indian Music", part 1.

19 *Javāhir*, ff. 10r, 23r–28r.

20 Amnon Shiloah, "Jewish and Muslim Traditions of Music Therapy", in Peregrine Hordern, ed., *The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 74–81; Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], "The *Ṭhāṭ* System of Seventeenth-Century North Indian *Rāgas*: A Preliminary Report on the Treatises of Kamilkhani", *Asian Music*, 35:1 (2003/04), pp. 1–13.

21 Katherine Butler Brown [Schofield], "Hindustani Music in the Time of Aurangzeb", PhD dissertation (SOAS University of London, 2003), pp. 177–225.

22 Jalaluddin Dawwani, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1879), pp. 99–101.

23 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2 (2004), pp. 61–72, see pp. 62–63.

24 Brown [Schofield], "Hindustani Music", pp. 177–225; Matt Rahaim, Srinivas Reddy and Lars Christensen, "Authority, Critique and Revision in the Sanskrit Music-Theoretical Tradition: Rereading the *Svara-mela-kalānidhi*", *Asian Music*, 46:1 (2015), pp. 39–77.

25 *Javāhir*, ff. 24v–25r.

26 On rasa, see Ali, *Courtly Culture*, pp. 183–206; on its Islamicate interpretations in the field of music, see Schofield, "Learning to Taste the Emotions".

27 *Javāhir*, ff. 66v–68v.

28 For the classic iconography, see Ebeling, *Ragamala Painting*.

29 *Javāhir*, ff. 99r–100v.

30 George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 162; Emma J. Flatt, "The Authorship and Significance of the *Nujūm al-'Ulūm*: A Sixteenth-Century Astrological Encyclopaedia from Bijapur", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 131:2 (2011), pp. 223–44.

31 Flatt, "Authorship", pp. 223, 229; instrument chakrams in 'Ali Adil Shah I, *Nujūm al-'Ulūm*, MS IN 02, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ff. 183v passim.

32 *Nujūm*, ff. 212r–13r.

33 Carol S. Reck and D.B. Reck, "Drums of India: A Pictorial Selection", *Asian Music*, 13:2 (1982), pp. 39–54, see pp. 39–44; *Javāhir*, ff. 26v–28r.

34 Rinjing Dorje and Ter Ellingson, "'Explanation of the Secret Gcod Ḍa ma ru': An Exploration of Musical Instrument Symbolism", *Asian Music*, 10:2 (1979), pp. 63–91.

35 *Nujūm*, f. 271v.

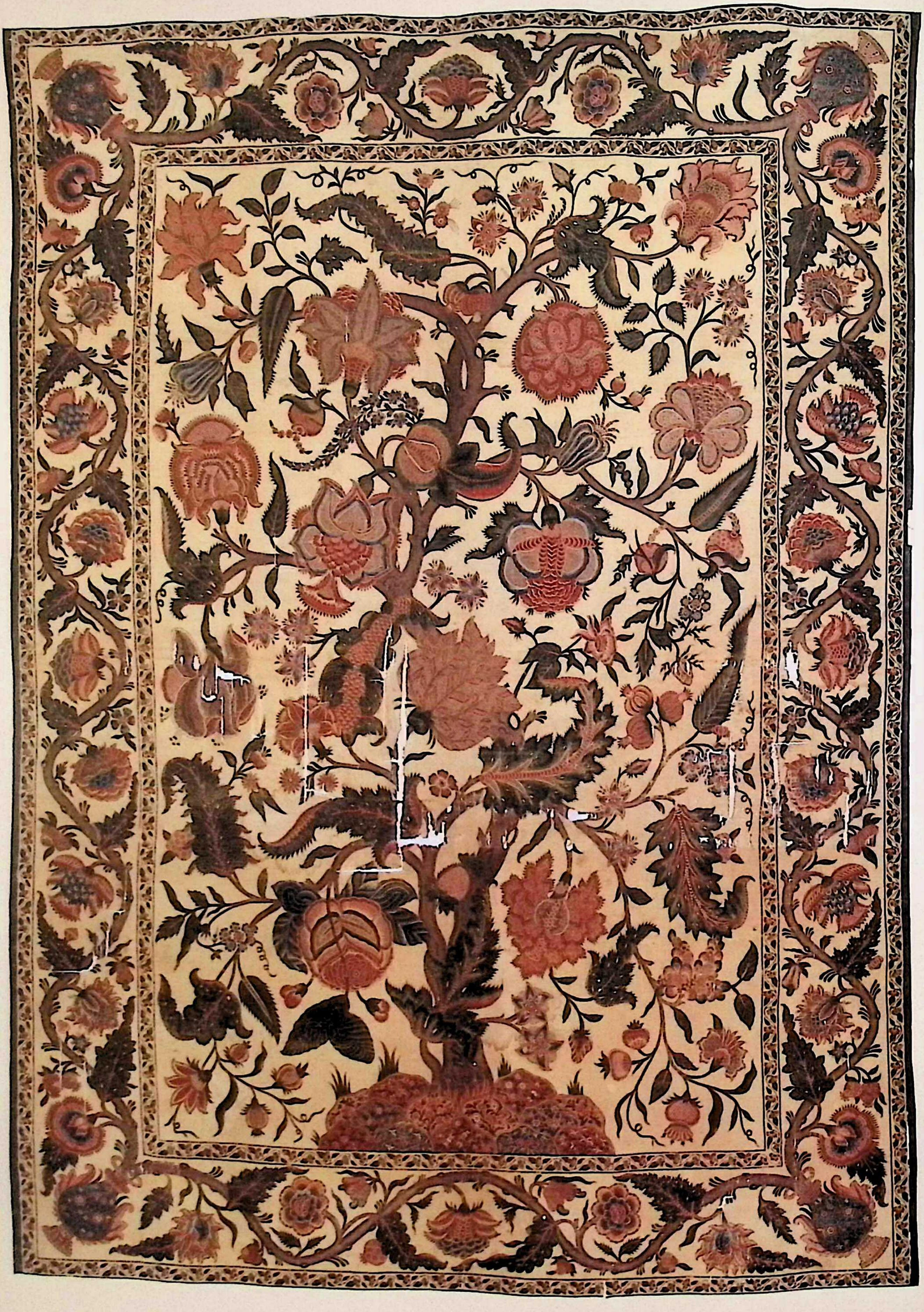
36 Bonnie C. Wade, "Music as Symbol of Power and Status: The Courts of Mughal India", in C. Frisbie, ed., *Explorations in Ethnomusicology* (Detroit: Information Co-ordinators, 1986), pp. 97–109.

37 The following description is a paraphrase of *Nujūm*, ff. 212r–13r.

38 *Javāhir*, ff. 97r–98v.

39 Dakhni: *jogin rūp*, f. 100v; Persian: *shakl-i ān misāl-i jogin*, f. 101v.

40 On harmonizing the body politic see Schofield, "Musical Culture under Mughal Patronage".



# The Tree of Life and the World of Wonder

## ‘Aja’ib Imagery on 17th-Century Kalamkaris

*Sylvia Houghteling*

In 1669, the English East India Company sent to India an order for 2,000 cotton paintings of “large branches for [the] Hangings of Romes [rooms]”.[1] The cotton cloths that were supplied to Europe were painted with dyes to depict a bending tree whose branches swayed and dipped towards the ground (figure 1). Flowers tumbled off the branches and met flowers growing from the craggy pointed rocks below. Emerald leaves with serrated edges snaked up the trunk of the tree. The cotton hangings with their “large branches” were profoundly sensual. The branches, bursting with heavy flowers, curved to the ground and seemed poised to take root, yielding daughter trees below.

It is a condition of export art that it is often unable to name itself. These cloths have come to be known as “tree-of-life” textiles; they were given their name to evoke the Biblical tree of life in the garden of Eden, which was a popular subject for English and French embroidery of the 17th century. Thus, these cloths are usually seen as an early index of European intervention in the aesthetics and economics of South Asia. I hope to show that with their toothy leaves, bursting blooms and flaming thorns, the tree-of-life textiles epitomize a fantastical visual sensibility unique not to Europe, but to the cosmopolitan visual culture of the 17th-century Deccan sultanate of Golconda.

### The Kalamkaris of Golconda

While Golconda is most famous for its diamond mines, in the 17th century the region was also known for its cotton cloths that were painted in liquid dyes. The cloths were painted at various sites in the northern and southern regions of the Coromandel coast, and at painters’ villages in Burhanpur and Sironj in present-day Madhya Pradesh. The textiles pleased many markets and were sent to far-flung locales.[2] They were shipped to consumers in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Iran, in addition to the large numbers sent to sites throughout Europe (figure 2).[3] They were known in Europe as “chintz”, and are called “kalamkari” (a Persian word literally translated as “pen-work”) in contemporary scholarship. In addition to the 2,000 cotton “hangings” cited in the 1669 directive, many thousands—perhaps millions—more were packed carefully

1
Bed-cover (palampore), Coromandel coast, 18th century. Cotton; plain weave, mordant painted and dyed, resist dyed; 271.78 x 197.49 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Bequest of George Blumenthal and Gift of Indjoudjian Freres, by exchange, and The Friends of the Islamic Department Fund, 1982 (1982.66).

into water-tight chests and sent on European ships from ports along the Coromandel coast to Dutch, French, Danish, Swedish and English customers who eagerly hung the brightly coloured cloths on the walls of their homes or used them as palampores (bed-coverings).[4]

The painted cotton cloths from Golconda, sent by the thousands from the port of Machilipatnam, were known by European officials to be the finest in quality. South Asian artisans had perfected the spinning of cotton's ragged fibres to produce fine threads; they had innovated the use of dung, lime and citrus to bleach the cloth; they had discovered the mordants that would make the red madder or chay-root dyes vibrant and colour-fast, and they virtuosically painted a steady, calligraphic line with a bamboo or reed pen using watery, iron-based ink.[5] In the Golconda region that is the focus of this article, the dyers had the ecological advantage of the running water of the Krishna river, which was rich in calcium that deepened the intensity of the ruby-red dyes.[6]

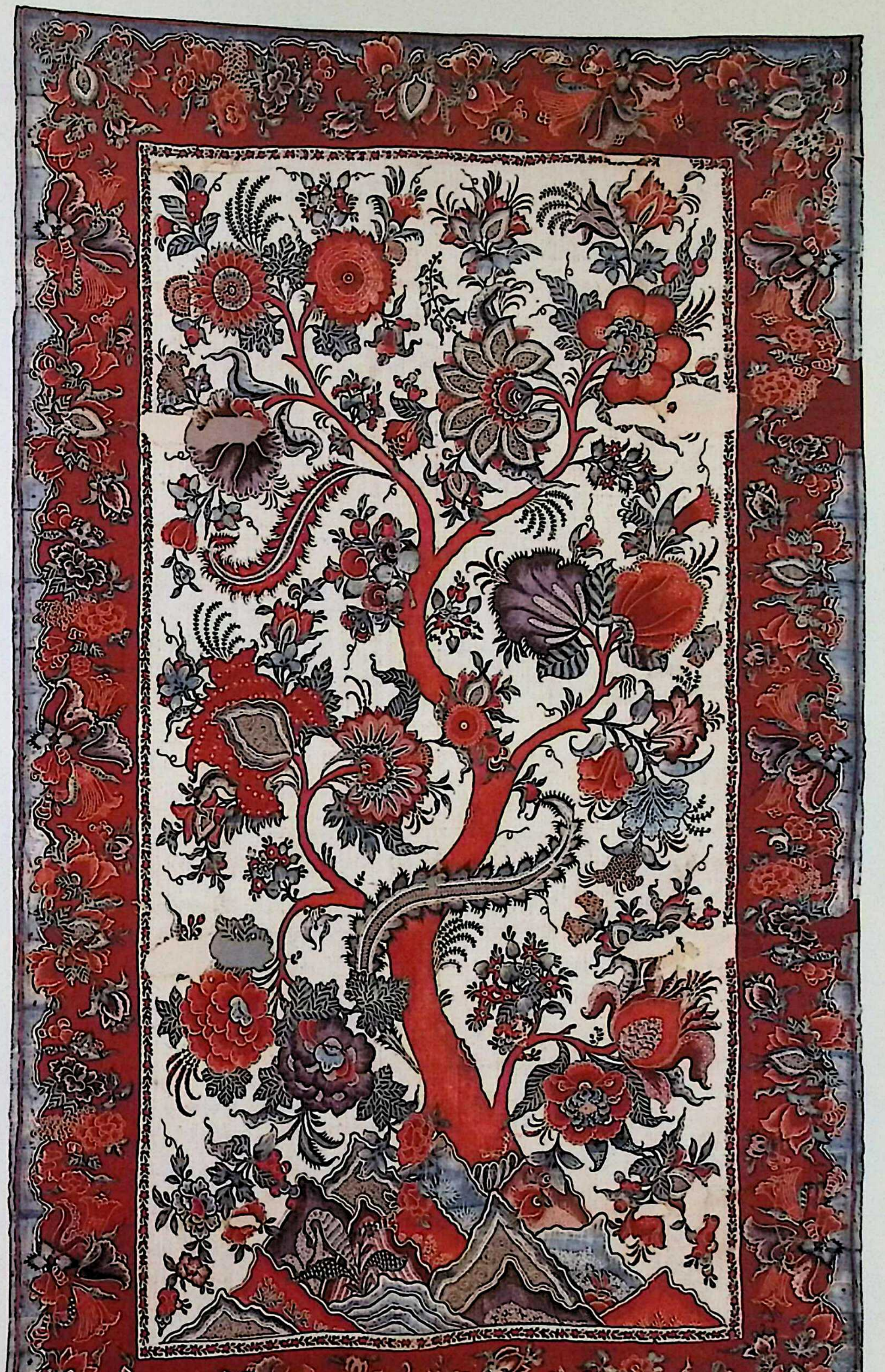
In the 17th century, these brilliantly painted cotton cloths were a revelation for Europeans. Accustomed to the dark colours and heavy textures of wool, European consumers were astounded by the thinness of the cotton, the whiteness of the bleached cloth, the brightness of the dyes and the exoticism of the designs. The painted cotton kalamkari revolutionized English visual culture across the social spectrum—bringing light and colour into the homes of the middling classes and the wealthy alike, inspiring generations of English embroiderers to enliven their woollen stitching, and, ultimately, generating the demand for cotton textiles that led to Europe's Industrial Revolution.[7] For these reasons, kalamkari textiles have been most rigorously studied by European historians, and have been classified by art historians in the uncertain category of export art.[8]

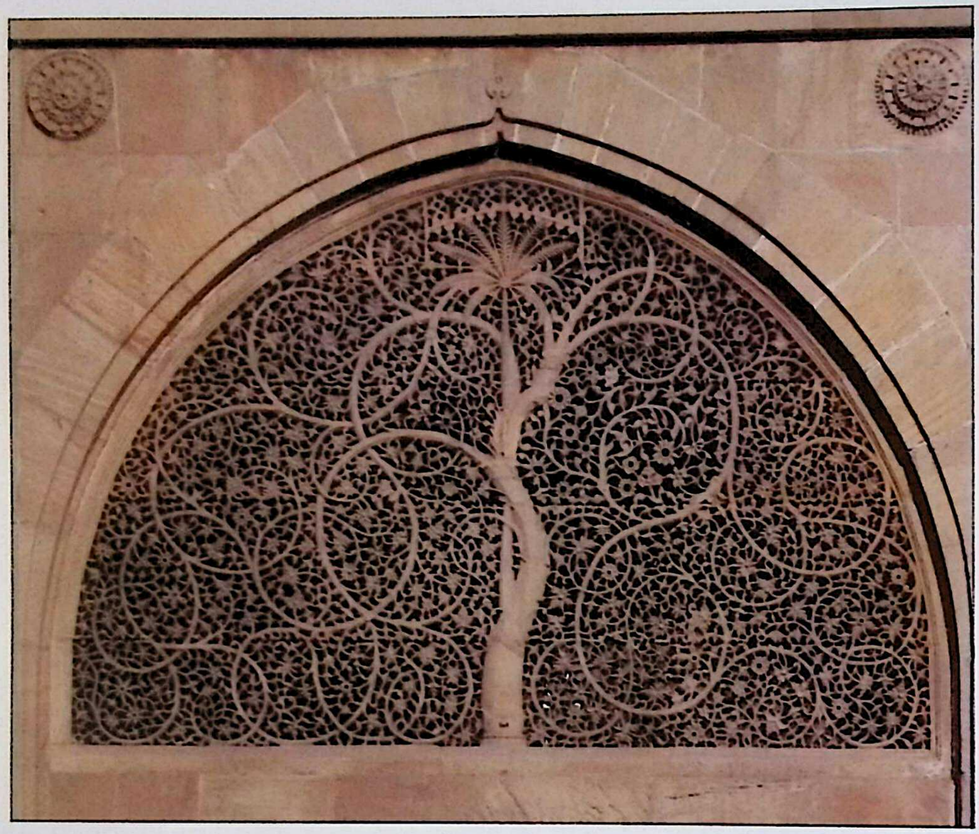
### Tree-of-Life Imagery

The bursting flowers on the palampores hint at their origins in the beady eyes and jagged mouths of demons that have few precedents in European art. These textiles occupy an important, and largely under-acknowledged, place within the history of South Asia. The tree-of-life textiles were a site where creative artisans digested the patterns of European embroidery together with motifs from Chinese porcelain, Ottoman brocades and Persian painting. Here, timid floral tropes converged with a fantastical form of painting depicting marvellous beings and composite creatures that flourished in 17th-century South Asian visual culture. As a result, the cloths that were sent to Europe contain traces of this wild play.

Tree-of-life textiles have always exceeded the role of pure decoration through their suggestions of garden splendour, paradisiacal plentitude and impossible fecundity. The proposal that we see these textiles as emerging from cosmopolitan, non-European art-historical traditions is intended to open up the visual, cultural and "semantic horizons" of these objects, and not to lock in a single meaning for their iconography or style.[9] John Irwin and Katharine Brett, the great historians of "chintz" textiles, first articulated the inherently hybrid, "polygenous" nature of these textiles that unite

**2**
Palampore, India, for the Sri Lankan market, first quarter of the 18th century. Cotton; painted resist and mordant, dyed; 182.88 x 113.19 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Fernando Family Trust Gift, in honour of Dr Quintus and Mrs Wimala Fernando, 2010 (2010.337).



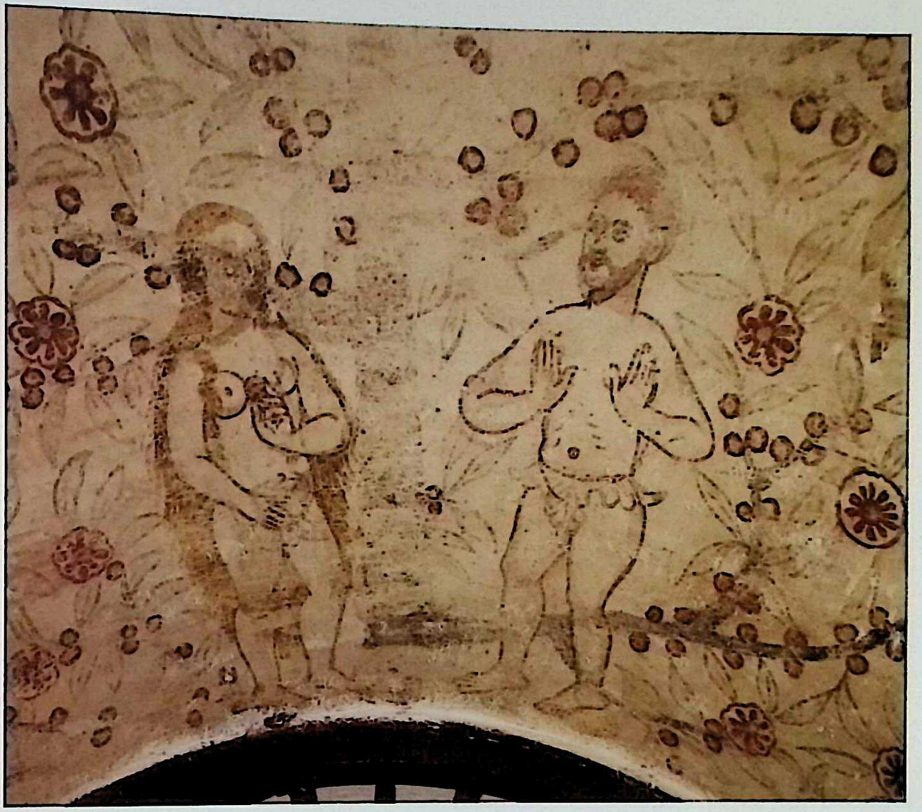


3
Jali screen. Sidi Saiyad Masjid, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, c. 16th century. Photograph: Sylvia Houghteling.

"the most diverse and disparate cultural elements". "The odd thing," they wrote, "is that the flowering-tree palampore appears no less exotic to Asian eyes than it does to European. Observed from either standpoint, its inspiration seems to be alien, irreconcilable with the observer's own culture."[10]

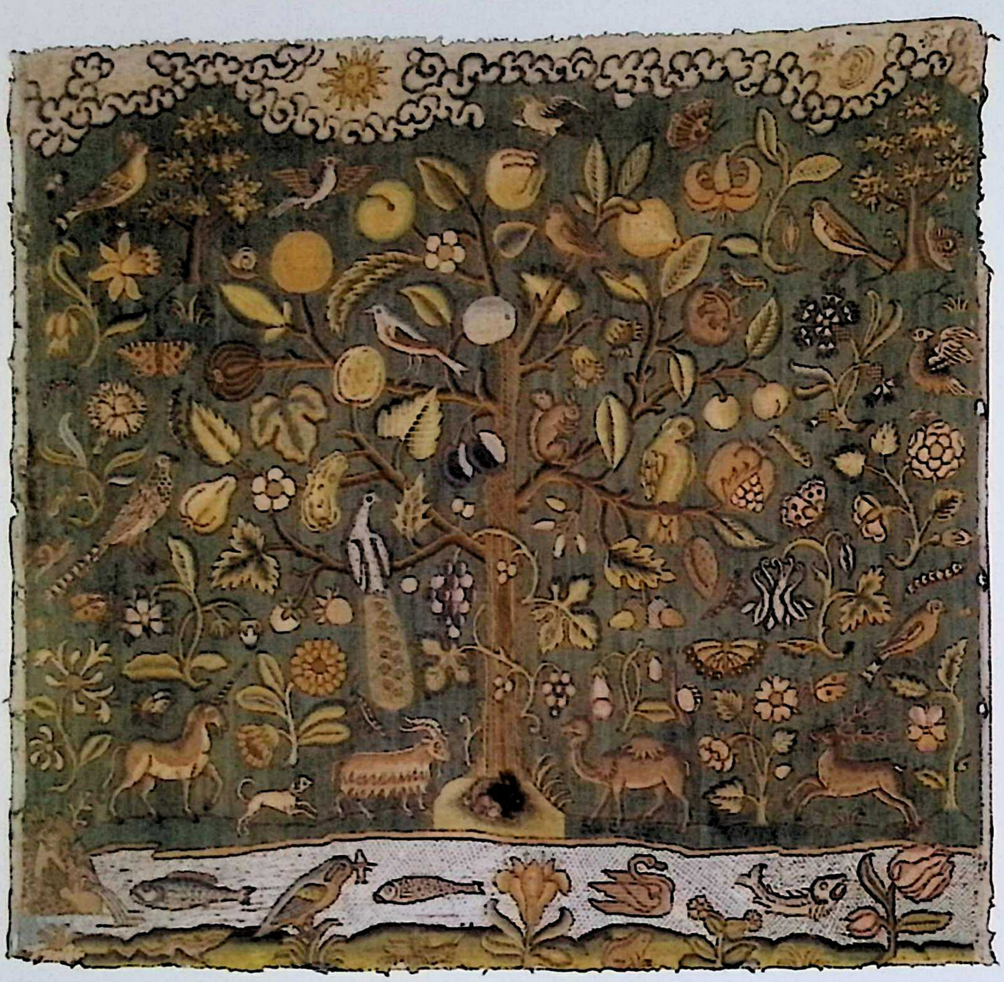
While Irwin and Brett argued that the motif derived from European pattern books sent to India, or emerged from an Elizabethan practice of placing actual tree boughs in bedrooms, they also recognized the flowering tree motif in Chinese calligraphy and Timurid painting.[11] Other scholars have pointed to connections between the textiles and pierced stone motifs on the jali screens of Gujarati mosques (figure 3).[12] The textiles simultaneously evoke the wish-fulfilling tree, garden pageantry and festivals, and the vibrant tradition of composite imagery that has enlivened South Asian painting and sculpture for centuries. Tree-of-life textiles also embody the energy of the cosmopolitan, hybrid visual style, known in Ottoman art as the "saz" style—a form of decoration that married the floral with forest imagery of hungry demons and lashing dragon-tails. As observed by Irwin and Brett, each additional visual source makes the final product less "reconcilable" with any single culture or visual style. Perhaps that is why, at the furthest reaches of our "semantic horizons" is the possibility that these outward-looking textiles are expressive of one of the weirdest of the wondrous tales of the early modern period that was circulating in the Persianate world and had made its way into small-scale manuscript paintings by artists in Golconda. It is the tale of the waq-waq tree—a mythical plant that bore not flowers or fruit, but women's bodies and animal heads.

4
Adam and Eve, painting in Sé Cathedral, Old Goa, completed 17th century. Photograph: Sylvia Houghteling.



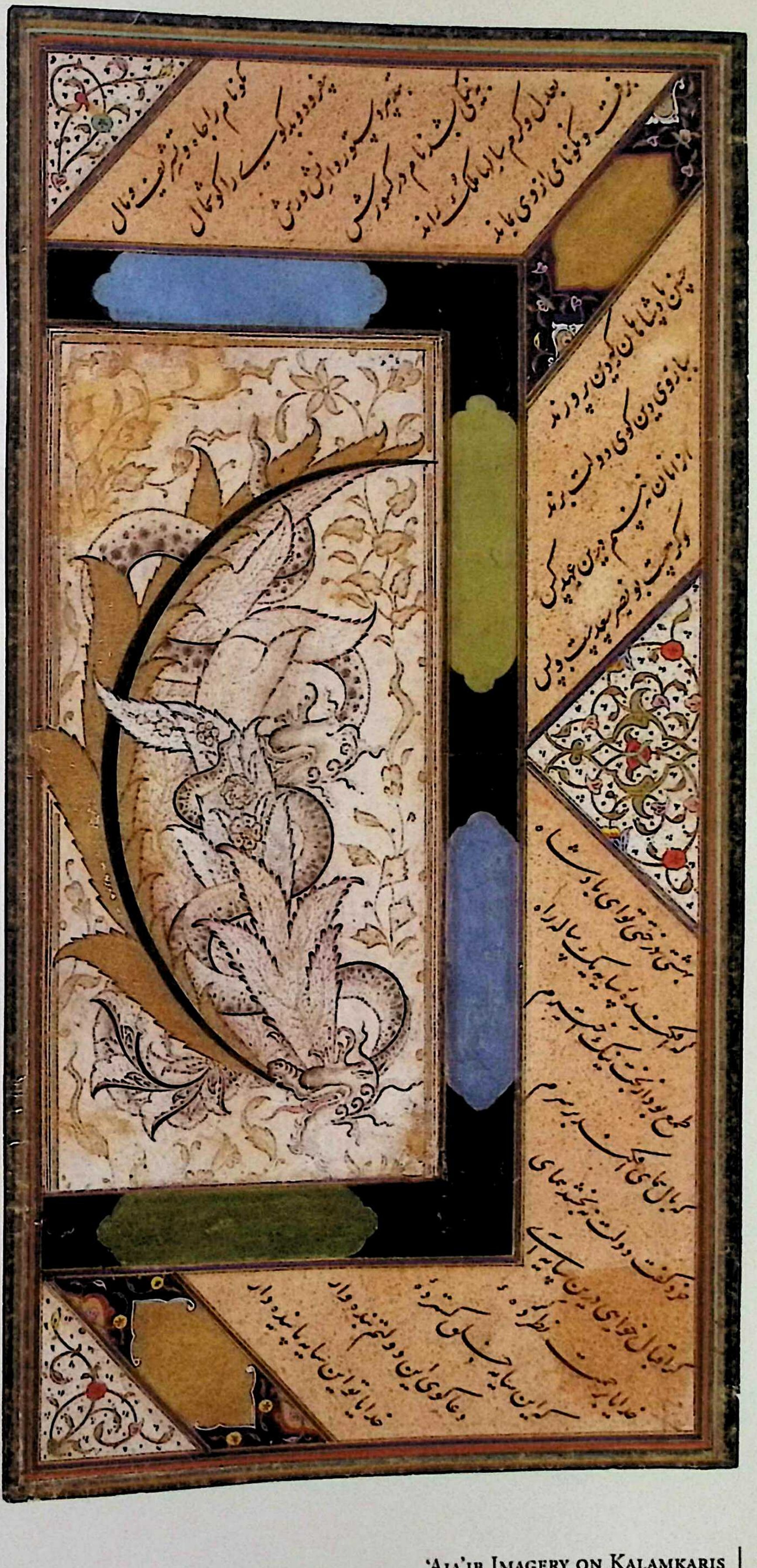
In the context of the Judeo-Christian world, the tree of life was fabled to have grown in the garden of Eden. It was both the tree of knowledge from which Eve ate the apple, and a mythically abundant tree that protected Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Eden. In Protestant religious texts of the 17th century, the tree of life was said to bloom continuously, producing fruit and flowers at the same time and providing shelter and sustenance for those who stood beneath it.[13] English domestic embroidery of the 17th century depicted a stocky version of the tree of life. It resembles a fruit tree, quaintly laden with a variety of fruits (figure 5). That this iconography existed in South Asia is confirmed by a painting tucked into an archway at the Portuguese Sé Cathedral in Old Goa. The painted plaster stretching overhead depicts the tree of life curling around the figures of Adam and Eve, its abundant leaves sheltering the newly naked figures (figure 4).

In parallel stories, Sanskrit texts from the medieval through the early-modern period used the symbol of the kalpavriksha—a mythical wish-fulfilling tree—as both a term of esteem for beneficent kings, who gave to their subjects as generously as the wish-fulfilling tree, and for many actual kinds of trees that sustained people during times of drought or famine.[14] According to some mythologies, the original kalpavriksha appeared at the time of the churning of the ocean, and lasted on earth until people began to wish for evil things, at which point the tree left earth for the heaven of the gods. In each of these mythologies, the tree is not a passive decoration, but an active presence—imparting wisdom, providing shelter and sustenance, and granting wishes for those good enough to ask.



5
The Tree of Life, British, first half of the 17th century. Canvas worked with silk thread; tent, Gobelin, and couching stitches; 57.15 x 61.28 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1305).

Closer to the site of production, the culture of trees was alive with magical and spiritual associations in the early-modern Deccan. Ali Akbar Husain has analysed one of the most incredible images of trees springing to life in the context of the Bijapur poet Abdul's 1615 *Ibrahim Nama* written for Sultan Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II. In this extended metaphor meant to praise the king and evoke the coming of spring, a scented breeze dispatched by the sultan awakens the forest trees from their winter slumber and inspires them to form a composite caravan that marches to the sultan's Vasant (springtime) festival celebrations. At the sight of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah, the barren trees are restored to their full splendour of foliage and blooms; they present silken offerings and move their boughs up and down, as though perfuming themselves. Husain has shown that in a manner consistent with Indian literary traditions, the poet likens the blossoming trees to the courtly ladies. In Husain's translation, the poet evokes the colouring of textiles in his figurative language, writing that "the trees in their flush of foliage and opening blossoms are as if dyed in the colours of the ladies, who clearly outrival their cousins".[15] In paintings from Bijapur during this period, flowering trees commune animatedly with wandering female yoginis and with sensuous, spiritual lovers, suggesting what Deborah Hutton calls the liminal, or "wild" space of a spiritual journey.[16]



6

Two dragons entwined on a spray of stylized foliage, Turkey, about 1575. Ink, colour washes, and gold on paper; 18.10 x 9.53 cm. The Edwin Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.85.237.18). Photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA.

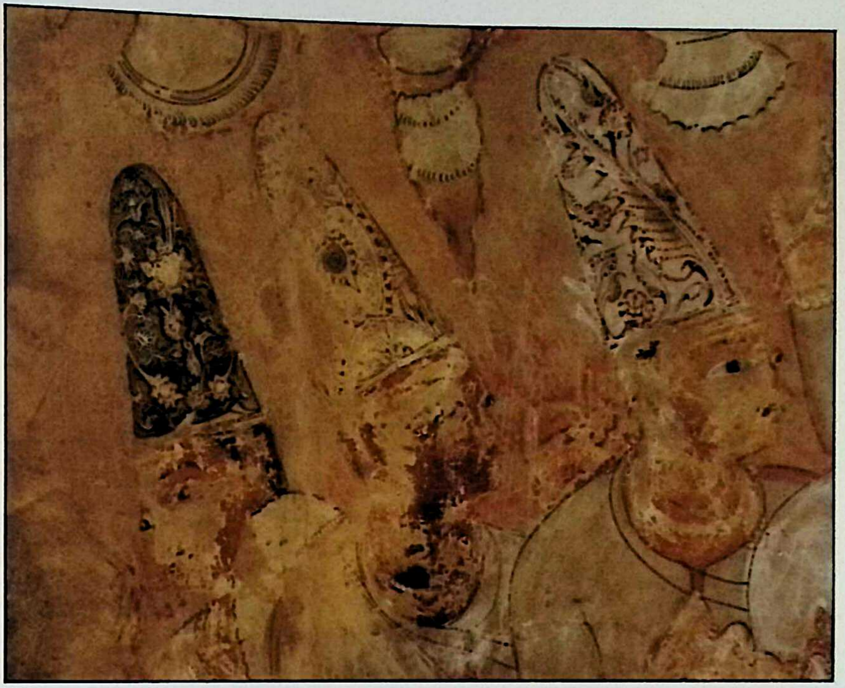
The flowering tree textiles of the Deccan were never explicitly intended to illustrate a particular story; yet in their dynamic composition, they are suggestive of the enchanted trees of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah's garden, and the generously sentient wish-fulfilling tree. It is their visual appearance, not any single contextual narrative, that enlivens these trees. While regional myths and poetry resonate with the depictions of flowering trees on cloth, the three most distinctive features—their asymmetrical forms, jagged leaves and enormous flowers—emerged from Persianate and Deccani decorative traditions that exist at the border between the floral and the figural, the ornamental and the narrative. In recuperating the heterogeneity and, indeed, the grotesquerie of the flowering tree form, we can also assert the imaginative power of the artisans in South Asia who invented it.

## Trade and the Saz Style

European scholars, such as Irwin and Brett, have likened the serrated leaves of the tree-of-life kalamkari textiles to Flemish verdure tapestries, but a more likely origin for the snaking, toothy leaves was the region's trade and cultural ties with the Persianate world and the Ottoman empire.[17] Within Islamic art, these leaves are characteristic of the saz style. Scholars suggest that the saz style is "named after a mythical enchanted forest of leafy plants".[18] Indeed, enchanted creatures seem to inhabit the deep woods of saz paintings, with bizarre vegetation and serrated leaves barely hiding the lurking presence of fantastical beings. Within the textile arts, the wildly curving saz style is characterized by jagged leaves, composite flowers, mythical animals and palmettes.[19]

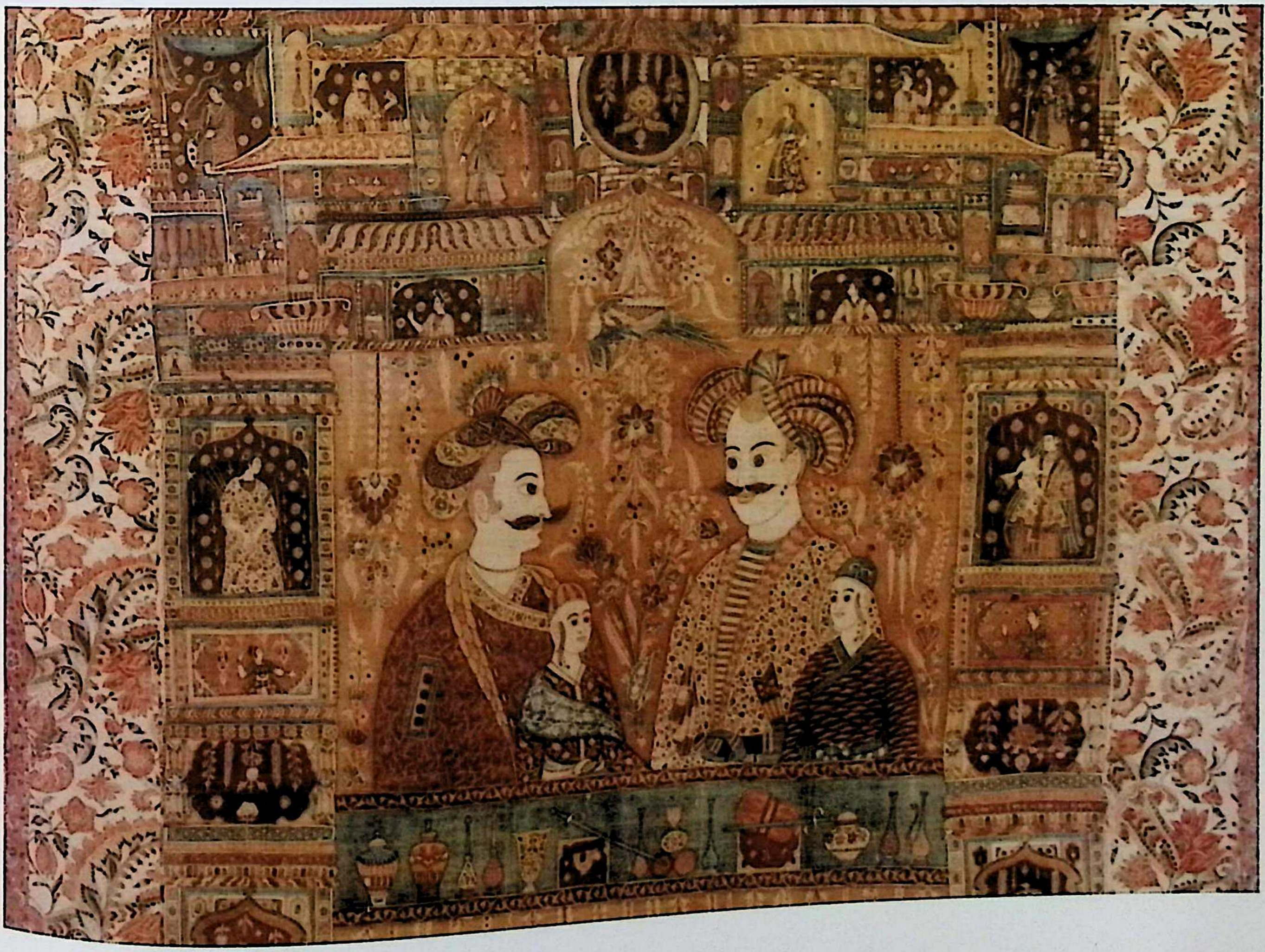
The saz style emerged in mid-16th-century Ottoman Turkey during the reign of Murad III, but it had its origins in the 15th-century reception of Chinese art in Herat and throughout the Persianate world. The saz pen-and-ink drawings, produced in the Ottoman imperial workshops, served as templates for brocade garments and polychrome ceramics, all of which contain the dynamic saz leaf that intertwines with dragons and demons taken from Persian and Chinese porcelains and painting (figure 6).[20] The style is sometimes referred to as the saz qalami, which connects the style with the arts of the reed pen, or qalam (also kalam), used by the artists to paint their virtuosic curving lines.[21] The use of the qalam relates the saz style to the practice of kalamkari, pen-work. Kalamkari can be distinguished from block-printing because of the freehand style of the painting. Using a curving line and a flourish of the wrist, the kalamkari painters could capture the elegant spines and jagged edges of the saz-style leaves.

The painted walls of Lepakshi, located in southern Andhra Pradesh, provide evidence that the distinctive, toothy saz-style leaf existed in the Deccan by the 16th century (figure 7). Motifs like the saz leaf travelled from Ottoman realms, Iran and China to the cosmopolitan ports of Golconda not only via paper designs but also in the form of decorative art objects such as painted tiles and ceramic dishes that exposed the artists working at ports to new imagery. In a subsidiary image on a monumental painted cotton from the Victoria and Albert Museum (figure 8), the artist has lifted figures of the Madonna and Child (panel to upper right of main image). While past



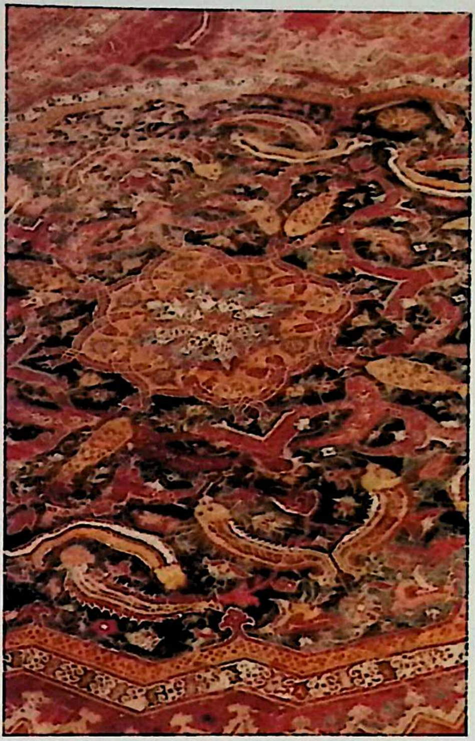
7
Ceiling painting, Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh, late 16th century. Photograph: Sylvia Houghteling.

8
Detail of a wall hanging, Coromandel coast, c. 1640–50. Cotton; mordant dyed and resist dyed; 259.1 x 152.4 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum (687–1898). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



scholarship has attributed this imagery to circulating Jesuit prints, it could also have been filtered through Mughal painting or an extant velvet from Safavid Iran.[22] On the left-hand side of the same textile the artist seems to have captured a Hindu Ragamala scene in which a lone woman sways to unseen music (above the main image on the right), that would have circulated as a manuscript painting (figure 8). The painter has also worked to evoke the effect of translucent glazes in the depictions of Chinese porcelain vases with cloud collars (panel below the main image). When the artists of Golconda rendered mythological figures and phoenix-like birds, they may have been receiving this imagery not from pattern books, but instead, from the Chinese porcelain objects that the 17th-century European traveller William Methold recounts were popular as dishware among Muslim consumers at the port of Petaboli.[23]

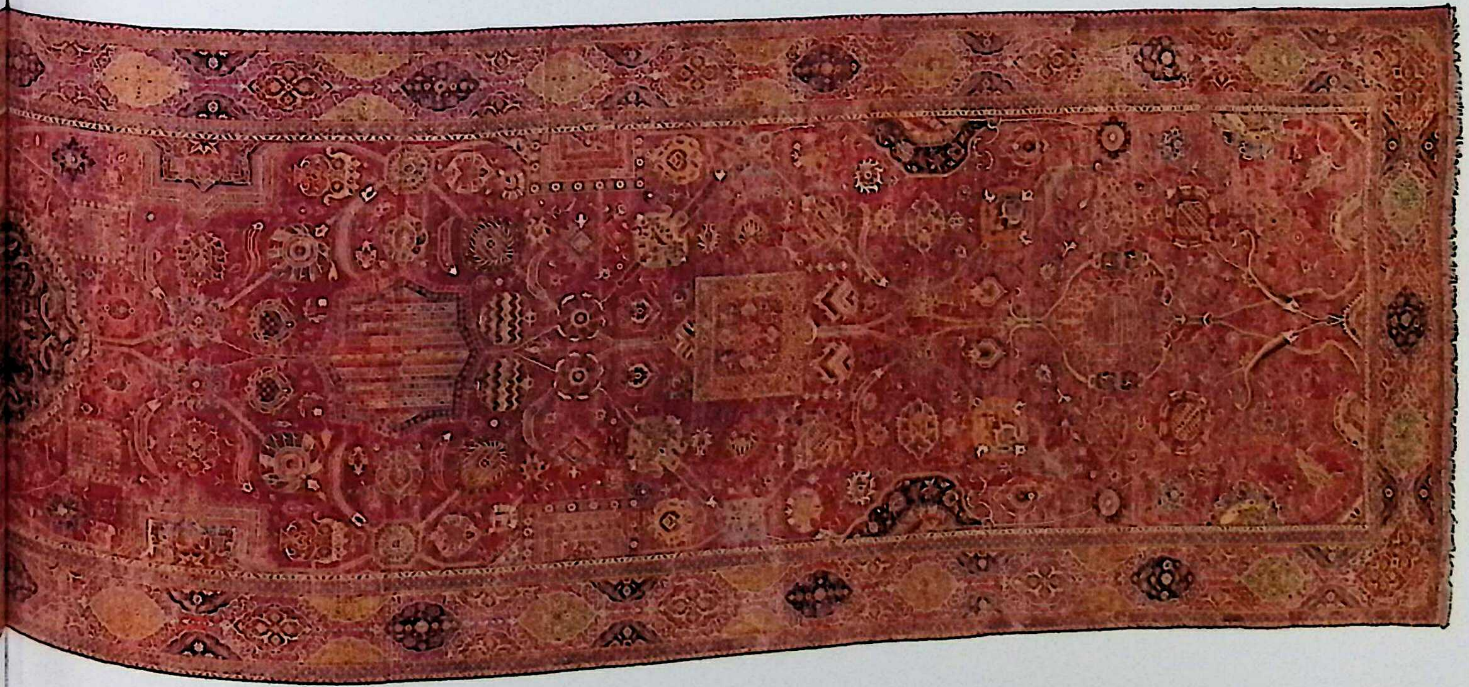
The style of objects introduced through the maritime trade with Iran, Turkey and China also corresponded with local figural traditions of asymmetry, dynamism and fantasy. An enigmatic kalamkari now held in the Musée de l'Impression sur Étoffes in Mulhouse, France, contains wild and unexpected figures.[24] Rosemary Crill has dated this textile to 1650–75 and posited that it was made for the Golconda court.[25] From the four edges of the cloth, fantastical figures spread towards the central medallion. There are swimming creatures stuffed with open-mouthed fish, beasts with ragged animal arms and blue snouts, yali-faced owls with animate wings, and an elephant made up of embracing monkeys. On this textile, even innocuous flowers seem to spout mouths, tongues and tails. The textile carries on the tradition of composite figuration in South Asia that can be found in sites ranging from the terracotta temples of Bengal to the courtly paintings of Golconda. Though aggressively figural, the differences between the imagery on this cloth and the flowers on the tree-of-life textiles are only a matter of degree, not kind; with two black dots for eyes and a pair of pointed ears,



the flowers transform into monstrous faces.

This colourful, experimental sensibility can also be seen on carpets from this period. North Indian carpets in the late 16th century were known for their experimentation with twisting, grotesque animal forms. The carpets made in Golconda in the 17th century maintained a hybrid style, reflecting the diversity of the region's carpet-weavers who had emigrated from Iran, Turkey and Central Asia. As Steven Cohen has shown, the weavers willingly departed from the style of Persian carpets that were also imported in large numbers. Deccani carpet-weavers used yellow, gold, white, salmon and mustard more liberally than their Persian counterparts; they filled the space with heavily-outlined jagged leaves.[26] Large-scale carpets from early 18th-century Hyderabad contain apparent similarities to the palampores in the prevalence of bright pinks, in the curving forms of the saz-style leaves and in the variation and inventiveness of the multihued floral forms (figures 9a and b).

**9a and b**
The Kevorkian Hyderabad carpet with detail, Deccan (Hyderabad?), c. 17th/18th century. 325.12 x 1595.12 cm. Museum of Islamic Art, Doha (CA.17.1997.OL). © Museum of Islamic Art Doha.



## The Textile Life of the Waq-Waq Tree

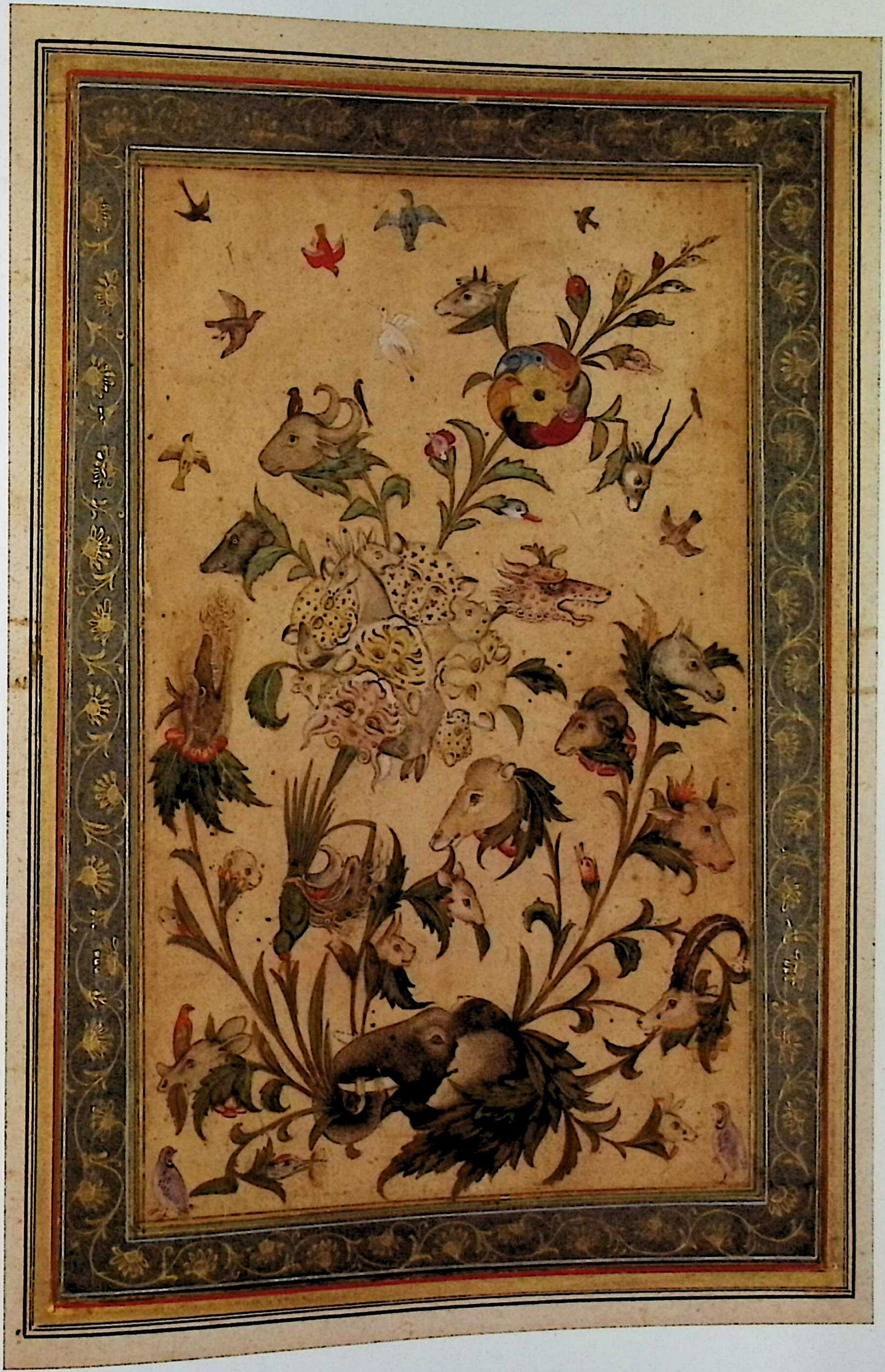
While artisans in many media experimented with the saz-style feathery leaves, the even more exotic motif of the waq-waq tree was travelling throughout the Islamic world in Arabic- and Persian-language manuscripts and early printed books, possibly even finding its way onto the overblown blossoms of the flowering tree textiles. As a decorative technique, the waq style refers to the combination of floral and figural patterns and runs in parallel with the European "grotesque". Both the waq style and the European grotesque share the composite floral vines that taper off into a human or animal figure. One of the seven principal techniques listed in explanatory texts about Persian painting, the waq (or vaq) ornament can be seen in painted representations of Timurid tents and on Mughal carpets.[27] As Laura Weinstein's research has shown, the waq style also appears in the borders of album pages made for the Qutb Shahi sultans of Golconda.[28]

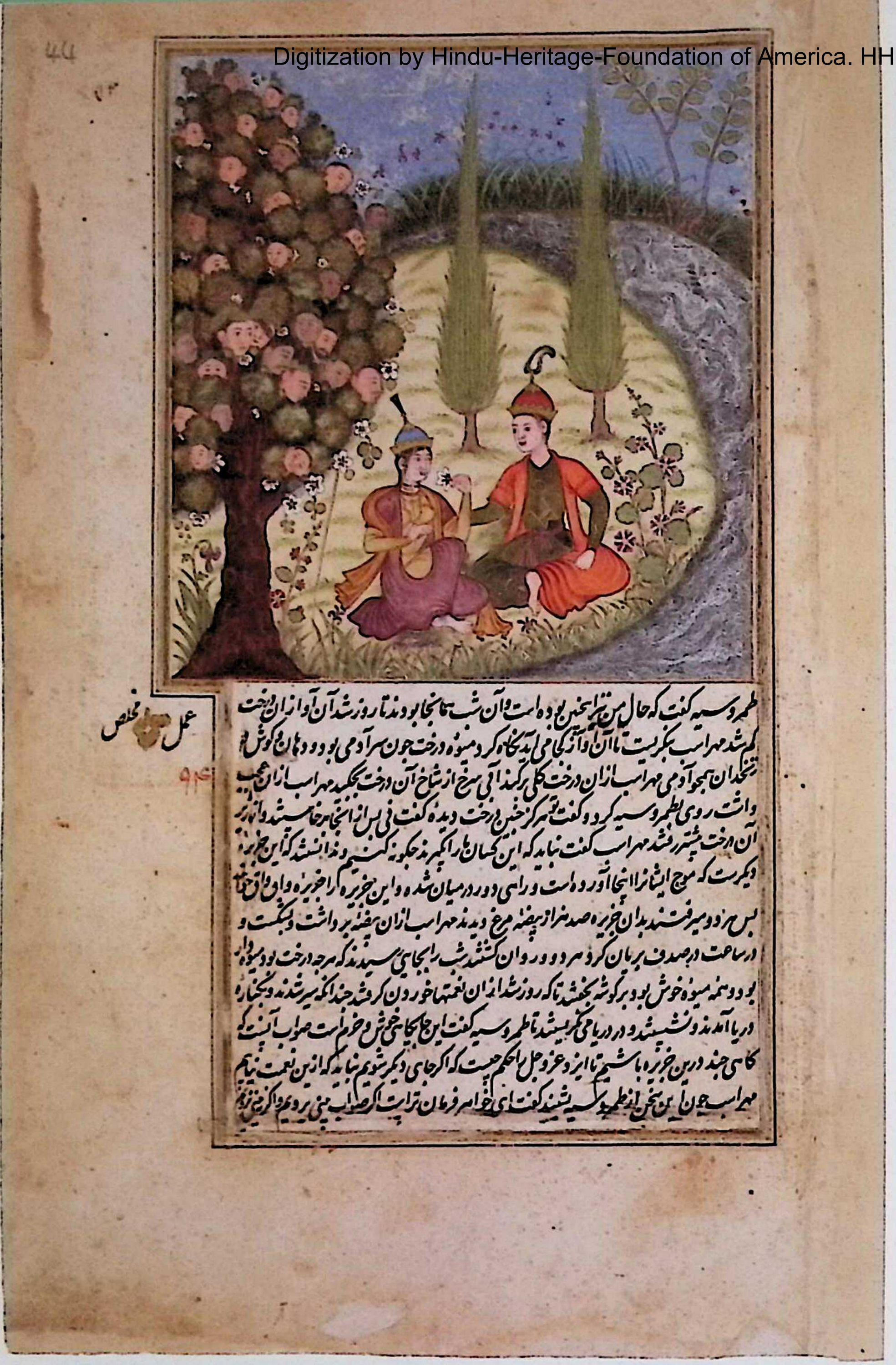
All of these are examples of figural arabesques, or what European scholars would call "grotesques"—composite floral vines made up of human or animal figures. A waq-style plant appears in a 17th-century painting from the Benkaim Collection, now at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and another version held at the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad. Both paintings have been tentatively attributed to the Deccan (figure 10). The plant that fills the ground of the paintings produces saz-style leaves, whose jagged edges resemble the leaves on the tree-of-life textiles. The branches of the plant blossom into the heads of animals such as elephants, deer and dragons, and, in the centre, into a composite demon face. In dialogue with this small-scale painting, the palampore's flowers no longer look so straightforwardly floral.

When the waq style is used in the context of a tree, it can also be an illustration of fables from Arabic and Persian literature that come under the heading of 'aja'ib, a genre of the wondrous and fantastical.[29] In the earliest tales, the composite tree was the talking tree that Alexander the Great encountered at the frontier of India, whose fruits had been replaced with the heads of humans and animals: during the day, it warned him against further invasions, terrorizing him about his endless conquests; at night, it spoke sweetly to him, but foretold his imminent death.[30] That some version of this story reached South Asia can be confirmed by the late 16th-century Mughal *Darabnamah*, a complex love story involving the ancestors of Alexander who also encounter a talking tree (figure 11).[31]

The most well-known version of the waq-waq story is of a tree that produces lovely ladies as fruit. The story is told in Qazvini's 13th-century *Geographical Dictionary*, and in various other geographies and stories of marvels associated with the 'aja'ib genre. A widely circulated version of this story appeared in a 16th-century printed Ottoman text called the *Tarih-i Hindi-i Garbi*, which described the West Indies and the discovery of the Americas.[32] The waq-waq tree is said to exist along the sea route to America on an island that is in the "Green Sea" that divides Hind, or India, from Sin, or China. In classical 'aja'ib form, the islands in this sea contain all kinds of wondrous creatures—cats with wings, tiny humans whose language cannot be understood, enormous white apes that eat elephants and camphor trees that spread

**10**
A floral fantasy of animals and birds (waq-waq), Mughal, early 1600s. Opaque watercolour and gold on paper; page: 37.62 x 26.67 cm; painting: 19.84 x 12.54 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift in honour of Madeline Neves Clapp; Gift of Mrs Henry White Cannon by exchange; Bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; From the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection (2013.319). © The Cleveland Museum of Art.





**11**
Tamrusiyah and Mihrasb under the Waq-Waq Tree, manuscript of the *Darabnamah*, Mughal, late 16th century. Opaque watercolour on paper; 35.88 x 22.86 cm. British Library (Or. 4615, f. 44r). © The British Library Board.

so widely they cover the sky. Then there is the island of waq-waq on which, the author writes:

> There is a kind of great tree whose fruit, which grow among its blossoms and boughs, are always lovely women such that those who see the beauty of their shape and the grace of their bodies are astonished…and in the branches of the tree they are suspended from their heads like a kind of fruit. Sometimes they all make the sound "wak-wak". Therefore they call the aforementioned island "Wakwak". If at some time one of these women be cut off from the base, she lasts for about two days. Then she perishes, and her beauty of form breaks up. It is related that sometimes men come together with them. They find a pleasant smell and a great taste.[33]

Of the many iterations of the *Tarih-i Hindi-i Garbi* there is one copy of the book that has been identified as having a Deccani origin.[34] Mark Zebrowski has identified the painting of the waq-waq tree from the Museum of Islamisches Kunst in Berlin as having a Golconda origin, but the painting has not been connected to the *Tarih-i Hindi-i Garbi*. Yet it embellishes upon the imagery of the waq-waq tree from other versions of the text.[35] Its trunk is enlaced with naga snakes and its branches are filled with brightly coloured horse, leopard and camel heads. The nude, dangling women, posed in gestures of modesty, seem only to extend the explosion of life on the tree's forms, while below the tree, smaller plants are brimming with fish and a wide diversity of mammalian heads. Stylistically, the painting of the waq-waq tree departs from the tree-of-life textiles. It is set against a dark ground and lacks the airy brightness of the white cotton cloths. Yet it evokes a fecundity, and a wondrousness that is shared between the two media—the painting and the palampore.

## Exports of Imagination

Global exchanges can occur along both exalted and quotidian paths. The tree-of-life textiles were painted and washed in the bright sunlight of the Coromandel coast. They were then packed onto ships, transported around the Horn of Africa, sold and unfolded in the domestic space of a European woman's dressing room, or unfurled on top of a marital bed. These textiles are among the most intimate material encounters of the early-modern world.

With their evocations of women of flesh who taste like fruit, they are also among the most erotic objects to have travelled on the high seas. Scholarship on hybrid forms like the grotesque or the waq-waq tree emphasize the utility of ornament for subversive means. In the case of colonial Latin America, ornament has been identified as a site where local artisans could render pre-Christian deities under the guise of "meaningless" floral decoration.[36] The case of the artisans who painted the flowering tree textiles is historically distinct. The artisans in Golconda were not suppressed, but were encouraged to use their imaginations. As an English East India Company official wrote to the agent commissioning the cloths, "Let them use their own fancyes in those works and colours which they can best perform, for it is not material what the fancyes or works the Patterns are, so [long as they] be finely done and [in] lively colours."[37] Instead of incorporating their own religious beliefs, the artisans seem to have been experimenting with the monstrosity of the outside world to which these cloths were to be sent. If the textiles evoke a demon face, an Ottoman dragon-tail, or an unmarked island's dangling damsel, it is because the artists were imagining the vastness of the ocean's wonders.

When these cloths arrived in Europe, was the suggestive ornament domesticated, was the meaning insignificant or lost? Can another culture's monstrous imaginings transport? Or did the fabulous tree gain other meanings at the end of its voyage? If the Golconda artist painted the tree as a composite of all outlandish exoticisms, in Europe it was perhaps taken to be the depiction of a uniquely Indian arboreal phenomenon. In the 16th and 17th centuries, European scholars, poets and theologians thought that the tree of life might have had its origin in the Indian fig tree, commonly known as the banyan tree. The lineage for this idea can be traced to Pliny, but it was revived in the 16th century by the Dutch humanist, Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–72). The idea of the banyan tree as the tree of life was also discussed at length by the New World explorer, Sir Walter Ralegh in his *History of the World* (1614).[38]

This idea was popularized when John Milton imported the Indian fig tree into his imagery of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden in his epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667). In Book IX, Milton writes that Adam and Eve sought cover from:

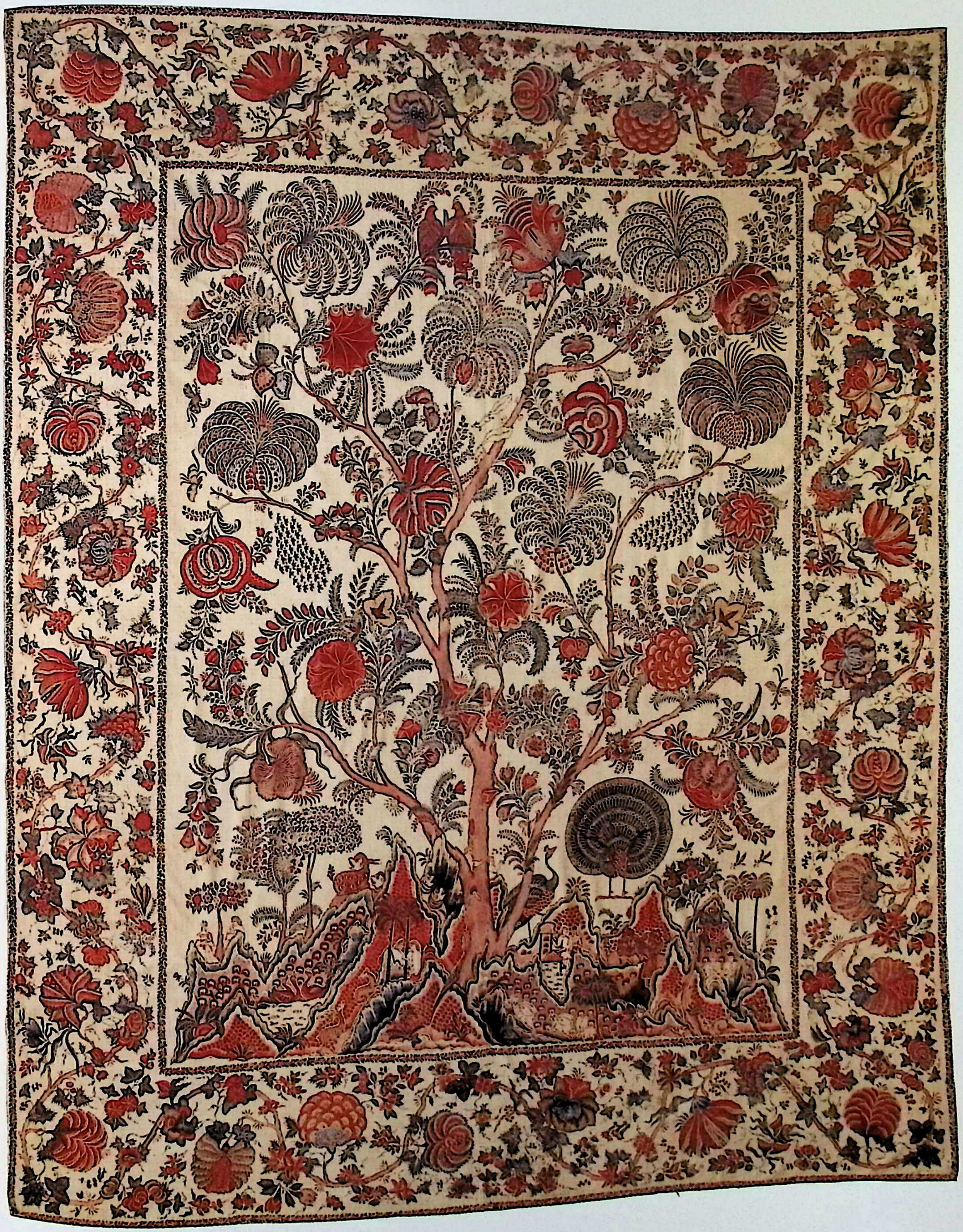
> The fig-tree, not that kind for fruit renowned,
> But such as at this day to Indians known
> In Malabar or Deccan spreads her arms
> Branching so broad and long, that in the ground
> The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow
> About the mother tree, a pillared shade.[39]

In this stanza, Milton locates the tree of life firmly in "Malabar or Deccan". While the slender stems on the painted cotton cloths do not resemble the "broad" trunk of an Indian banyan tree, and the leaves, with their tapered ends, depart from the rounded shape of the banyan's leaves, the morphological similarities may matter less than the metaphorical qualities the design suggests. Milton casts the tree as a feminine, maternal presence that "spreads its arms" low to the ground to birth "bended twigs" that will become its daughters. He enlivens the tree of life by making it not a European creation, but an export from India.

Did British consumers make this connection between the Indian trees on their textiles and the Biblical tree of life? One cloth that may have led them on this path is an 18th-century kalamkari bed-cover (figure 12). Perhaps presented as a marital gift, it is full of suggestive figures—at the top, pairs of birds and squirrels, and below, two loving lions, companionable monkeys, peafowl, and other varieties of animal, insect and human couples. Tucked between the lowest branches of the monumental tree are two naked humans—a man and a woman, like Adam and Eve, into whose outstretched hands fruits fall from a heavily laden branch. And lest the cloth only be enlivened by European tales, we see dangling from a low-hanging branch at right a flower with a wondrous "demon" face.

We should bring these objects into the canon of Deccan art because they contain manifestations, embellishments and revisions on some of the most pervasive, and yet still only faintly-understood phenomena of the "Golconda style"—the oversized, animate flowers, the dynamic twists and turns, the bright colours and the fascination with the fantastical. Although they are items of export, these textiles are also intensely local and particular to their place of origin and stand as a reminder of the complexity of global study. It would be easy to say that these objects emerge from a primordial mythology of the life-giving tree that persists across time and geographical space. Yet, in this case, artisans have created something different that was a necessity in this early-modern age of mercantile exchange: the tree-of-life textiles, and by extension, many similarly suggestive elements of Deccan art, have been fortified with the

**12**
Chintz palampore (textile panel), Coromandel coast, for the European market. Mordant painted and resist dyed cotton tabby; 276.01 x 220.98 cm. Royal Ontario Museum (934.4.11). With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum. © ROM.



ability to sustain many myths. In their strong boughs, these trees hold Adam and Eve, Alexander's soothsayers, and the heartfelt wishes of devotees. Even though the imagery has been quieted, we can still hear the chattering of monkeys, the shrieks of demons and the waq-waq cries of wailing women.

## Notes

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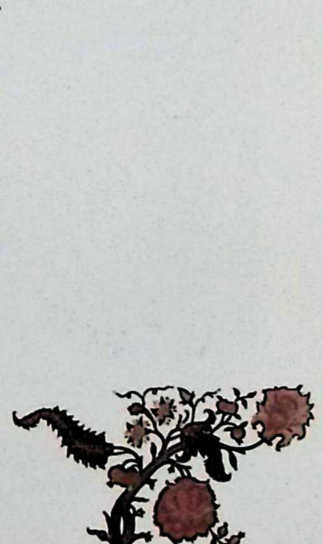

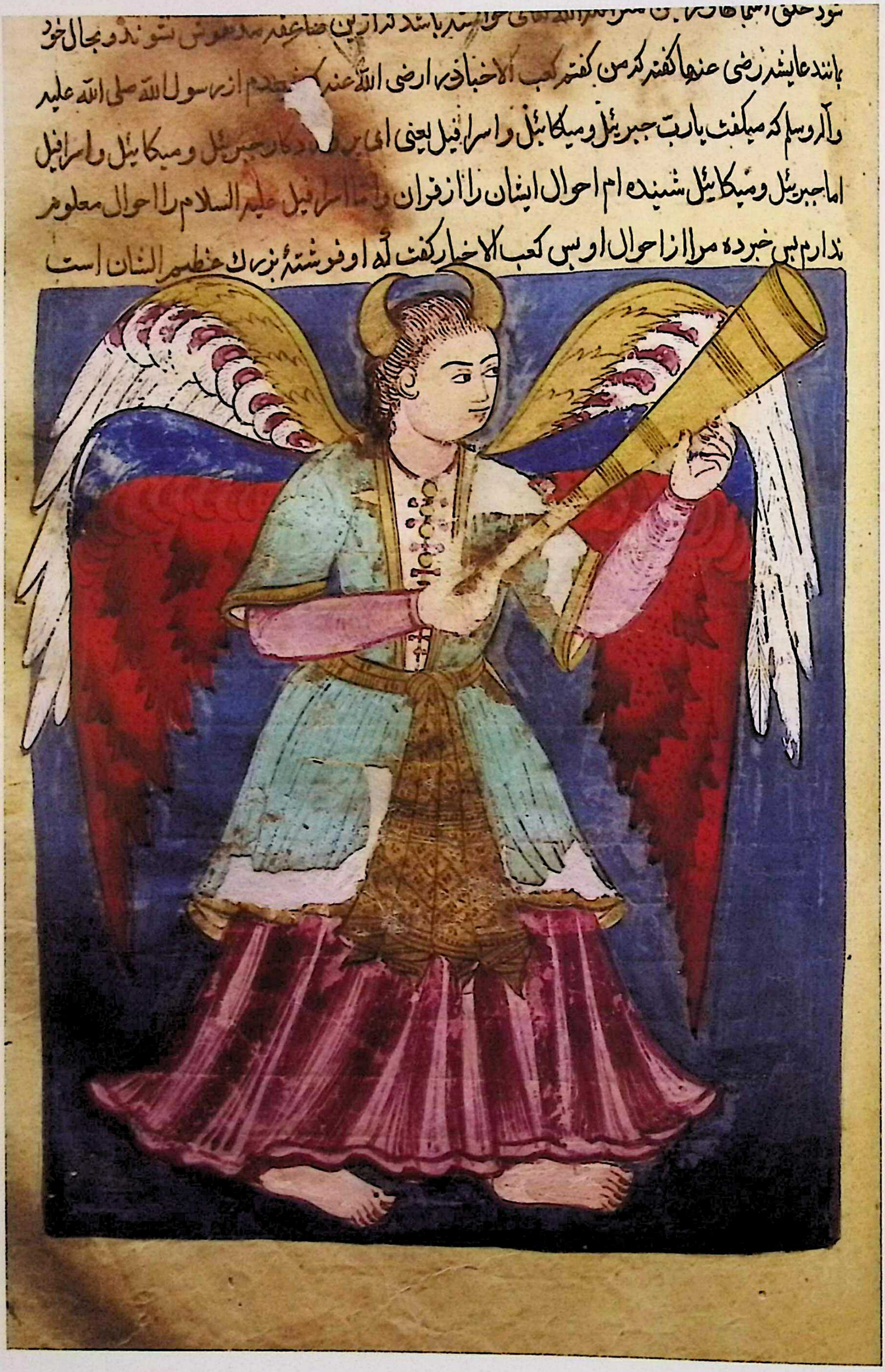

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# Documenting the Fabulous

## The ‘*Aja’ib al-Makhluqat* of the National Museum

### *Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami*

This essay focuses on a manuscript of the *‘Aja’ib al-Makhluqat wa-Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat* that was produced in the Deccan in the 17th century. Currently housed in the National Museum in New Delhi, this lavishly illustrated manuscript is a Persian translation of an Arabic text written in the middle of the 13th century by an Iranian scholar and diplomat, Zakariyya al-Qazwini. I will begin by introducing the text and its author, then describe the *‘Aja’ib*’s significance as exemplar of Arabic encyclopedism and as literature, then the text’s career in the Deccan, and lastly focus on this particular manuscript produced for the Bijapur court.

**The Text and Its Author**

The *‘Aja’ib al-Makhluqat wa-Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat* (“Wonders of Creation and Miraculous Things in Existence”) is an encyclopedic text that attempts to describe all of Creation. It reads as an inventory of the universe, abounding in descriptions of the stars and planets, of plants and minerals on earth, of monsters and strange creatures that inhabit islands in the corners of the world. All of this is painstakingly visualized and framed into an ordered inventory that combines cosmography with elements of fantasy and fable. Although attributed to al-Qazwini, the work is a compendium of various forms of knowledge that were already in circulation, many sources of which are identified within the text.

As a public official during the reign of the last Abbasid caliph in the second half of the 13th century, al-Qazwini would have had occasion to travel and would also have had access to other travellers’ accounts. He appears to have composed the *‘Aja’ib* during his travels through the Levant, gathering stories and fables, responding to diverse books, people and places that he came across in this richly interconnected zone. He also composed a work on geography, a more mainstream theme within encyclopedic literature produced in the Arab world: the *Athar al-Bilad wa Akhbar al-Ibad* (“Monument of Regions and Accounts of Their Inhabitants”). Al-Qazwini’s reputation, however, rests mostly on his *‘Aja’ib*, a work that merged cosmogony with

All the images are from the National Museum’s manuscript of *‘Aja’ib al-Makhluqat*, Bijapur, c. 1656. Ink and opaque watercolour on paper; folio size 38.6 x 24 cm. Courtesy National Museum, New Delhi. Acc. no. 58.48.

1

Ferishta Israfil. Detail of figure 5.

geography and the field of the marvellous. It gained new life particularly through translations in Turkish and Persian, which often added or varied descriptions that wove in topical elements. In many ways these interpolations added to the life of the text, extracting what counted as "curiosities" from the different cultures that the *'Aja'ib* travelled through.[1]

Al-Qazwini's compendium immediately preceded what could be referred to as the golden age of Arabic encyclopedic works in the Mamluk period from the 13th to the 15th century. A key feature was the adaptation and referencing of earlier literature, amply evident in the *'Aja'ib*. The most immediate source of reference was likely a Persian text with exactly the same title, composed by Mahmud al-Tusi for a Seljuk ruler in Persia, a century before al-Qazwini.[2] Al-Qazwini would have been familiar with this work, for the similarities between his text and the earlier one are striking. However it seems that al-Qazwini's work eventually overtook al-Tusi's and came to be identified with this theme and the genre of 'aja'ib literature (the word *'aja'ib* connoting the miraculous, magical, fabulous or unusual), going by the number of manuscript copies of this text available in collections the world over.[3]

### The *'Aja'ib*'s Career in the Deccan

Al-Qazwini's work was popular in the Deccan, at the courts of the Deccani sultanates and beyond.[4] The Deccan was particularly receptive to Arabic learning from fairly early times. This may partly have been on account of the steady influx of Arab traders who settled here even before the establishment of Islamic rule in the 14th century, and partly a result of statecraft practised by the Deccani sultanates of actively populating their empires with statesmen and scholars from overseas, which included Arabic scholars in large numbers. The *'Aja'ib* was one amongst the several Arabic compendia that found their way into the Deccan; in keeping with its career elsewhere, it was translated into Persian, increasing its accessibility.

Another reason for the popularity of the *'Aja'ib* in the Deccan, particularly between the 16th and the 18th centuries, was a predilection for the 'aja'ib as a theme within the aesthetic and literary terrain of the Deccani sultanates. This is reflected in many masnavis or poetic allegories composed in Dakhni Urdu, which merged fable and mysticism and evoked 'aja'ib as an aesthetic response. Ibn Nishati's *Phoolban*, composed in the 17th century, alludes to humans in animal forms and uses dreams and prophesies as metaphors for the human condition.[5] The deeds of Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib, the well-known 14th-century Sufi saint from the Deccan, were chronicled in a work which evoked 'aja'ib as a trope—the *Ghara'ib al-Karamat wa 'Aja'ib al-Mukashafat* ("Rare Miracles and Wondrous Unveilings"); and the historian Rafi al-Din Shirazi included a chapter on marvels and curiosities in his chronicle of the Bijapur empire in the 17th century, the *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*. The career of the *'Aja'ib* in the Deccan had other trajectories. It also fed into the *Nujum al-'Ulum*, a marvellous treatise that merged Indic and Islamicate systems of astrology, cosmology and magic to reinforce the relationship between kingship and territory (composed, it is now believed, by the ruler of Bijapur 'Ali 'Adil Shah I himself in 1570).[6]

## The *'Aja'ib* and the Aesthetics of Wonder

The *'Aja'ib* created a compendium on staggeringly varied fields of knowledge. Equally, it also offered pleasure afforded by tales of marvels and curiosity about the unknown. This made it immensely popular as literature, beyond its putative role as a digest of knowledge. As noted by Roy Mottahedeh, "The perception that something is out of the ordinary is of course, the element that gives the Ajaib their larger career in Arab and Islamic thought and accounts for the diversity of things that are sometimes considered wondrous according to the tastes of medieval authors."[7] He notes further that the *'Aja'ib* goes beyond homiletic or scientific literature, categories well-established in Arabic compendiums, to intersect with re-creative knowledge in the world of adab writing—writing that was produced both for edification and pleasure.

## The Structure of the *'Aja'ib*

In his introduction,[8] al-Qazwini presents both an epistemology for the *'Aja'ib* and a detailed catalogue (firhist) that orders the universe in accordance with this understanding. His arguments reflect intersecting streams of thought ranging from Quranic theology to Arabic and Greek scholasticism.[9] According to al-Qazwini, "'aja'ib" relates to the emotion of "hairat"—amazement, and knowledge of something not seen before, of which knowledge did not exist. Early in the text al-Qazwini makes clear the moral purpose of his text. He says, the compass and scale are instruments made by man to measure things with precision, but they are no match for the precision with which bees pour nectar into hexagonal honeycomb moulds, measured so that no air reaches the wax and honey. What is 'aja'ib in the world is seen not just in strange and exotic creatures or things, but equally in mundane things that are close at hand. Even if a strand of hair is observed, it can reveal the workings of the 'aja'ib and the ghara'ib. "Ghara'ib" is all that is strange and miraculous.

Al-Qazwini creates taxonomies to explain the meanings of the other two terms that make up the title of the work, "makhluqat" and "mawjudat". However, their tautology is evident as ultimately they mean the universe of God's creation, on earth and in the heavens. According to al-Qazwini, everything can be divided into things that are created (al-makhluqat) and all those that are existent (al-mawjudat), other than God. Everything that is created can be either self-subsisting or be dependent on something else. If self-subsisting it could occupy space, or not; and if occupying space it could have a body, or else could be related to matters of the spirit. A similar logic of classification permeates all things that exist (al-mawjudat).

Al-Qazwini peppers his account with parables and maxims to show how the ability to observe God's phenomena leads to self-purification and betterment on the one hand, and to knowledge of the Divine on the other. Human beings can deepen their understanding through observation and contemplation (nazar). Nazar is not just an act of looking but also of contemplation on God's existence. It broadens into speculation on the principles that underlie observed phenomena, known through the senses and reason. It is these principles that expand into an ordering and epistemological design for the work's organization of chapters, which treat each subject in sections proceeding from the empirical to the speculative. Thus each chapter begins with a section on bayan, meaning (known) sayings or statements, followed by resolution between what is true and what is false, fasl, and ends with nazar, meant both as the observing eye and contemplative reasoning, encapsulating al-Qazwini's summary.

To describe all things in the universe systematically, al-Qazwini divides his text into two broad sections, categorizing chapters dealing with celestial domains as uluwiyyat and those dealing with terrestrial realms as sufliyyat. The chapters on celestial domains deal with movable and immovable astral bodies, stars and planets, and angels. The second section on terrestrial zones contains descriptions of plants and minerals as well as animals, people and places, both real and mythical.

### The Manuscript in the National Museum Collection

I now turn to the National Museum's Deccani manuscript of the *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* that is the focus of this essay.[10] With over 400 illustrations amongst its 300-odd folios, this manuscript exemplifies the life of the text as a vividly illustrated and descriptive account of what lay beyond the ordinary in the cosmos. The scale and exuberance of the images mark it as one of the most extensively illustrated copies of the *'Aja'ib*. As noted in an earlier section in this essay, the *'Aja'ib* was a text that was meant to be illustrated so as to enhance the pleasure produced by the recounting of strange and marvellous instances of creation.

A note in the introduction states this manuscript was a copy (naql), translated from Arabic to Persian for 'Ali 'Adil Shah II (r. 1656–72)[11] while a date corresponding to 1565 mentioned in its colophon is probably inaccurate. The manuscript also bears the seal of Bari Sahiba, wife of Muhammad 'Adil Shah of Bijapur (r. 1627–56), indicating that she owned it at some point. I conjecture here that the manuscript may well have been shared by 'Ali 'Adil Shah II and Bari Sahiba, based on these two pointers within the manuscript.

Bari Sahiba played a central role in courtly politics at Bijapur, particularly after the death of her husband, when she administered the state for a brief while as regent for the underage 'Ali 'Adil Shah II. The relationship of Bari Sahiba and the young sultan is not clear. By some accounts 'Ali 'Adil Shah II was the son of Muhammad 'Adil Shah by an unknown woman; by others, he was Bari Sahiba's son by a mahout.[12] Bari Sahiba's powers rose during her regency; she is known to have overthrown a prominent minister at court and maintained close ties with the Portuguese and the Dutch. When she decided to go on Hajj following the end of her regency around 1661, after 'Ali 'Adil Shah II took over the throne, she requested the Dutch to arrange for her travel to Mecca. She spent the last years of her life travelling in West Asia, waiting for 'Ali 'Adil Shah II to send money for her return home—which he never did.

We know that this manuscript formed part of her library as it bears her seal, which reads "Pari Sahib, daughter of Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah",[13] for she was a Golconda princess, the daughter of Muhammad Qutb Shah (1595–1626). Perhaps the *‘Aja’ib* was an interest shared by Bari Sahiba and ‘Ali ‘Adil Shah II, before they parted ways.

### Illustrating the *‘Aja’ib al-Makhluqat wa Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat*

This manuscript bears a sarlawh illuminated in blue, gold, lilac and orange, colours that bespeak its Deccani provenance. It bursts with images, all executed in a vibrant style somewhat removed from the highly refined courtly aesthetic that had come to prevail in Bijapur and Golconda in the 17th century. The illustrations vary widely in nature; they include schematic diagrams of astral configurations, fabulous depictions of imaginary creatures as well as incredibly naturalistic portrayals of insects and plants. The paintings may appear anywhere on the folio in spaces earmarked by the scribe and are offset by monochrome backgrounds without any frames. In an entire section on botany, for example, trees, shrubs and herbs are painted without background, integrating text and image even more organically than in other sections. Several folios bear blank spaces meant for illustrations that were not filled in, implying that the manuscript was not fully finished. A universe of types was created here; perhaps these would also serve as stock imagery to be reproduced in other contexts.

The visuals recall illustrations from the *Nujum al-‘Ulum*, since the subject matter is similar, and there are also some compositional features from the manuscript of the *Pem Nem* produced in Bijapur in 1590–91.[14] The style echoes works of contemporary painters; for instance the sensuous and earthy representations of flora and animals bear resemblance to paintings made by the Bodleian Painter.[15] However, the style is simplified and shorn of painterly finesse that gave lustre to contemporary courtly productions. Adaptations of style may have been part of artistic practice in the Deccan: the artist Rahim Deccani, for instance, adapted his highly delicate style of painting for an earthy and sensuous depiction of birds and flowers on a lacquered pen box.[16] There are shifts in palette and figural styles in different sections of the manuscript, indicating that different hands were involved.

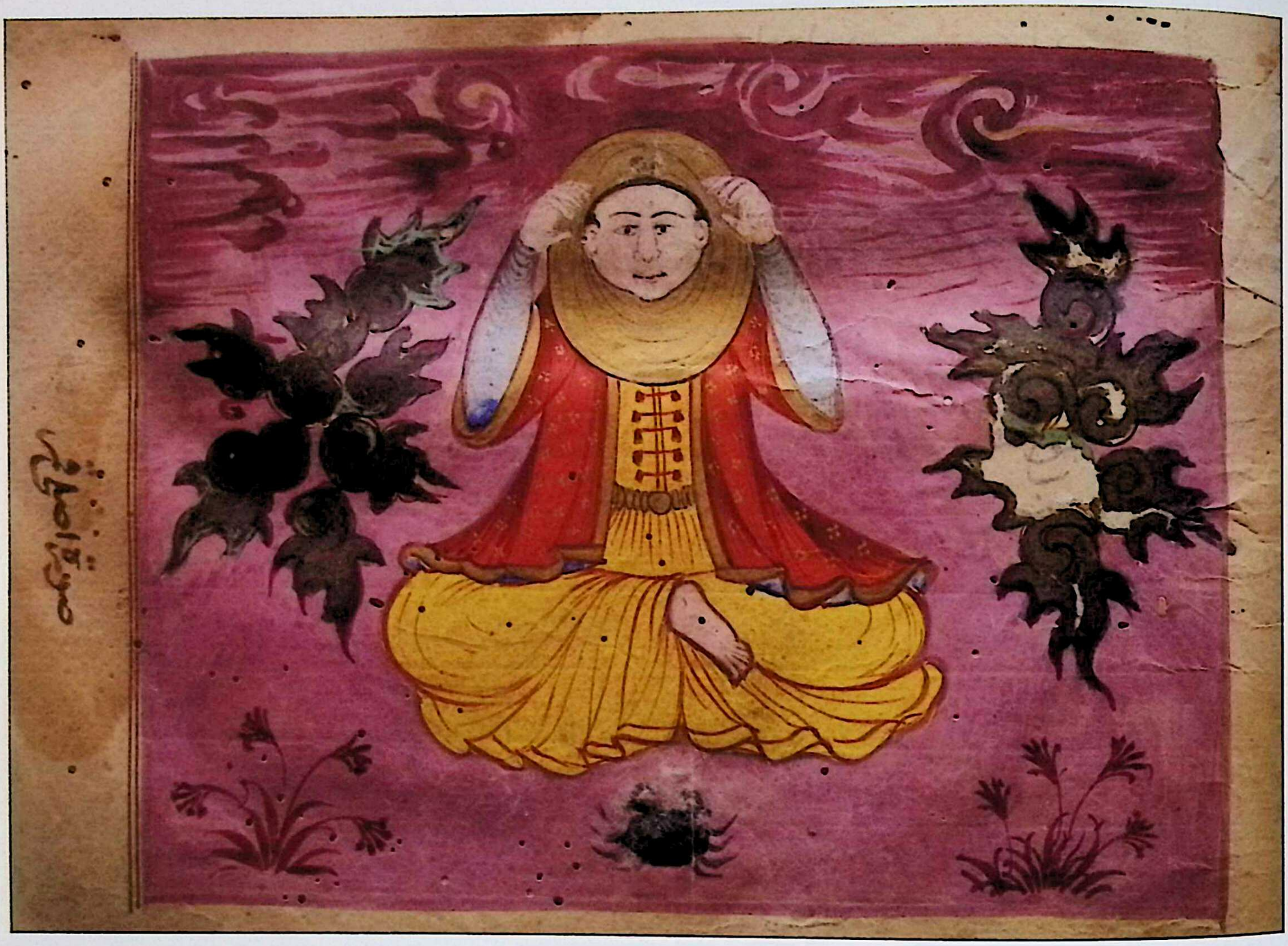
The following sections offer a selection of folios from the manuscript along with summary of the accompanying text, moving from the celestial to the terrestrial realms. The text is related to the imagery in order to appreciate these richly interpretative illustrations.[17]

### Uluwiyyat: The Celestial Realm

Within the heavenly spheres al-Qazwini includes the Sun and Moon, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, followed by the fixed stars (including the constellations and signs of the zodiac), and the ninth sphere which is the sphere of God.

*Shakl Falak i-Qamar: Likeness of the Sphere of the Moon* (figure 2)

Al-Qazwini quotes the Greek astronomer Bethlemuz from the book of Euclides to describe how the moon moves around its orbit in 28 days, in 28 stations (manzil). It stays for one night in each station, and for two-and-a-half nights in every zodiacal sign; on the last day it goes into hiding. The moon does not have any light of its own



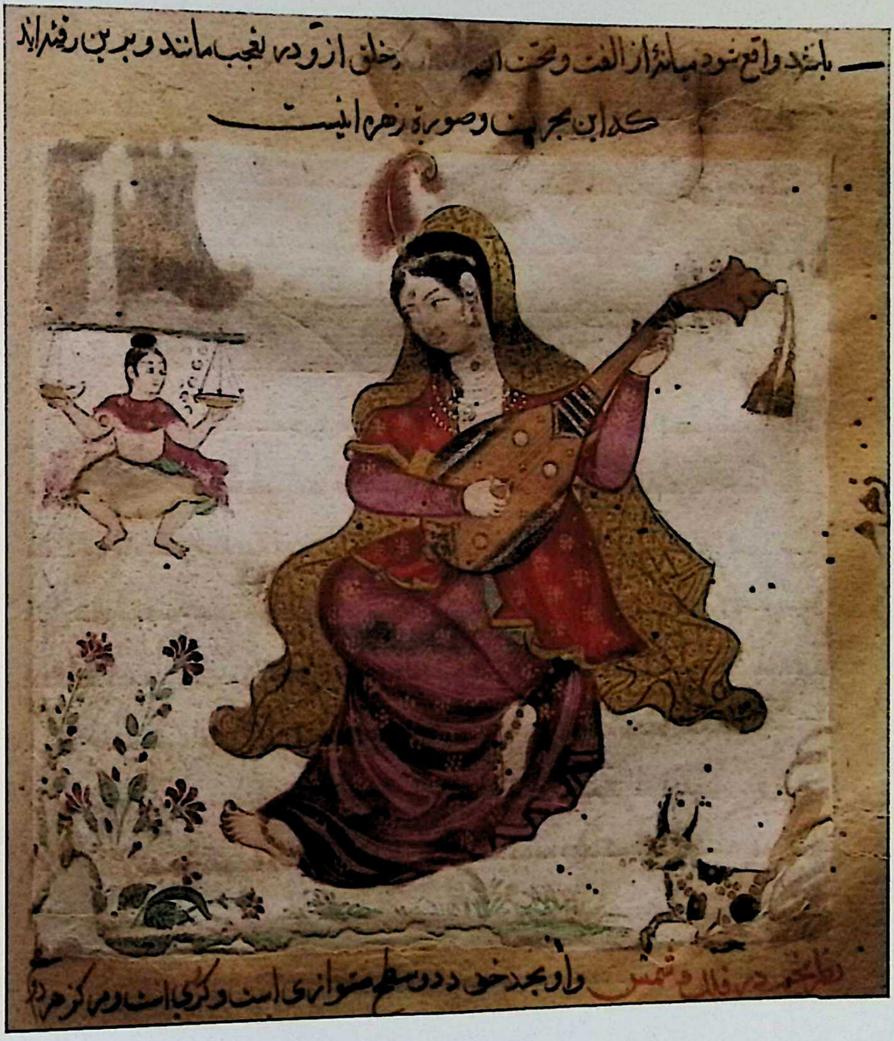
**2**
Shakl Falak i-Qamar: Likeness of the Sphere of the Moon.

but borrows from the sun. When it crosses the sun it becomes a crescent. Viewing the moon can have adverse effects.

Against a lilac background, the circular-faced moon sits facing the viewer, framing his face with a disc. Wearing yellow and orange robes, he could easily be mistaken for the sun. Chinese-style clouds materialize on either side of the figure, and a crab lies at his feet, connotating the astrological sign Cancer ruled by the moon. On the facing folio (not illustrated here) is a diagram representing the orbit of the moon and its stations.

*Surat i-Zuhra: Face of Venus* (figure 3)
According to al-Qazwini, Venus stays close to the sun. It is most auspicious when it appears in conjunction with Jupiter. Venus is associated with happiness, warmth, dance, music and love. It manifests itself as the face of a woman. Venus is a khunyagar, a dancing slave, a woman who gives pleasure.

The portrayal of Venus is one of the most exquisite figurative representations in the manuscript. She wears a flowing veil, several pearl strings and an aigrette. Associated with her are the astrological signs Taurus and Libra, as seen in the illustration.



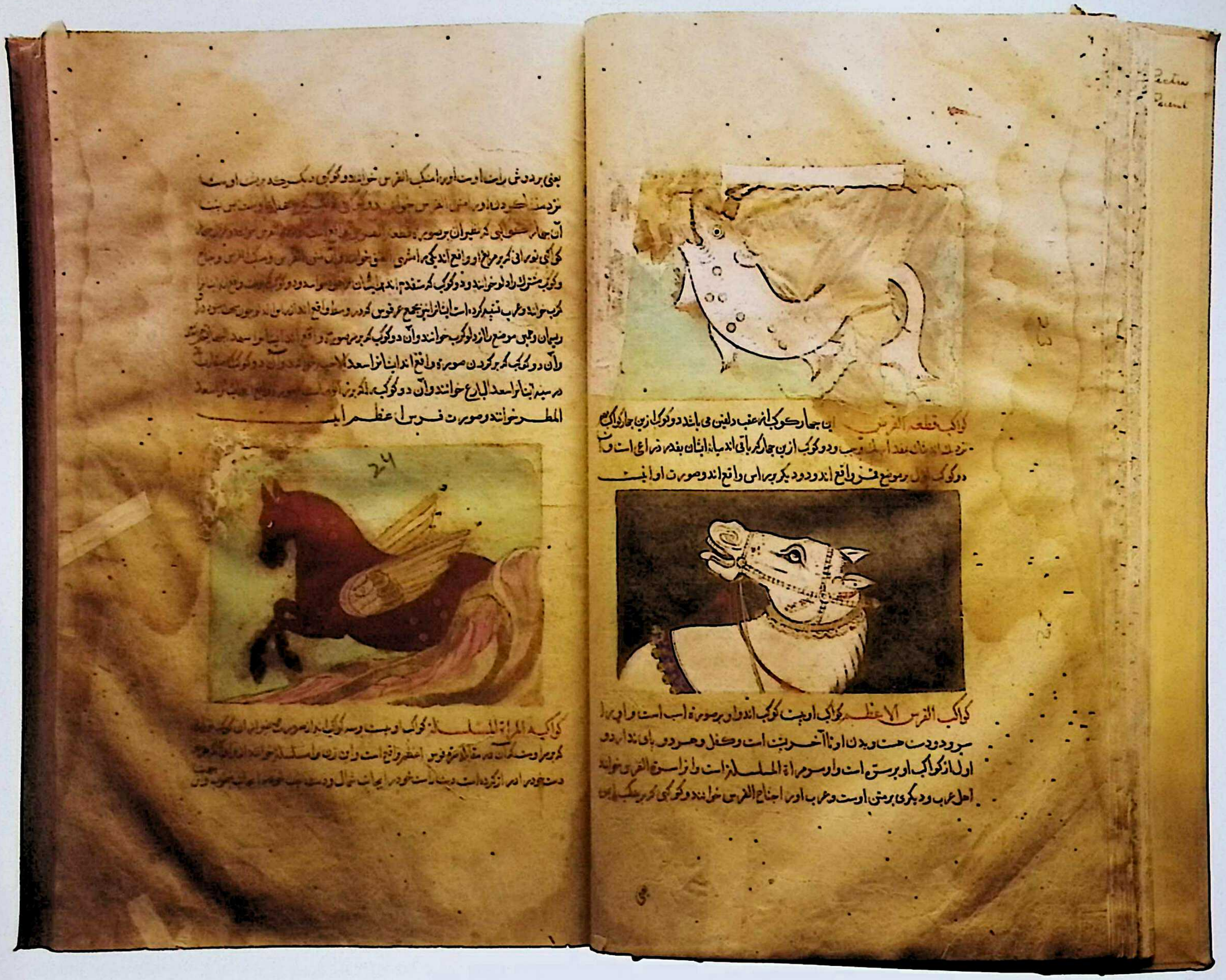
3
Surat i-Zuhra: Face of Venus.

*Azab Kawakib: The Horse Constellation* (figure 4)
The three pictures visualize the horse constellation in space, which assumes the shape of a winged horse without hindlegs from one side and a dolphin from the other, with dots indicating the position of the stars. The imagery is more painterly and fluid than most others in this section, noticeable particularly in the stunning cameo of the horse's head, white and luminescent against a dark backdrop.

*Ferishta: Angels* (figures 1, 5 and 6)
According to al-Qazwini, angels (ferishta) always remember God and ask for the remission of the sins of those who have erred.

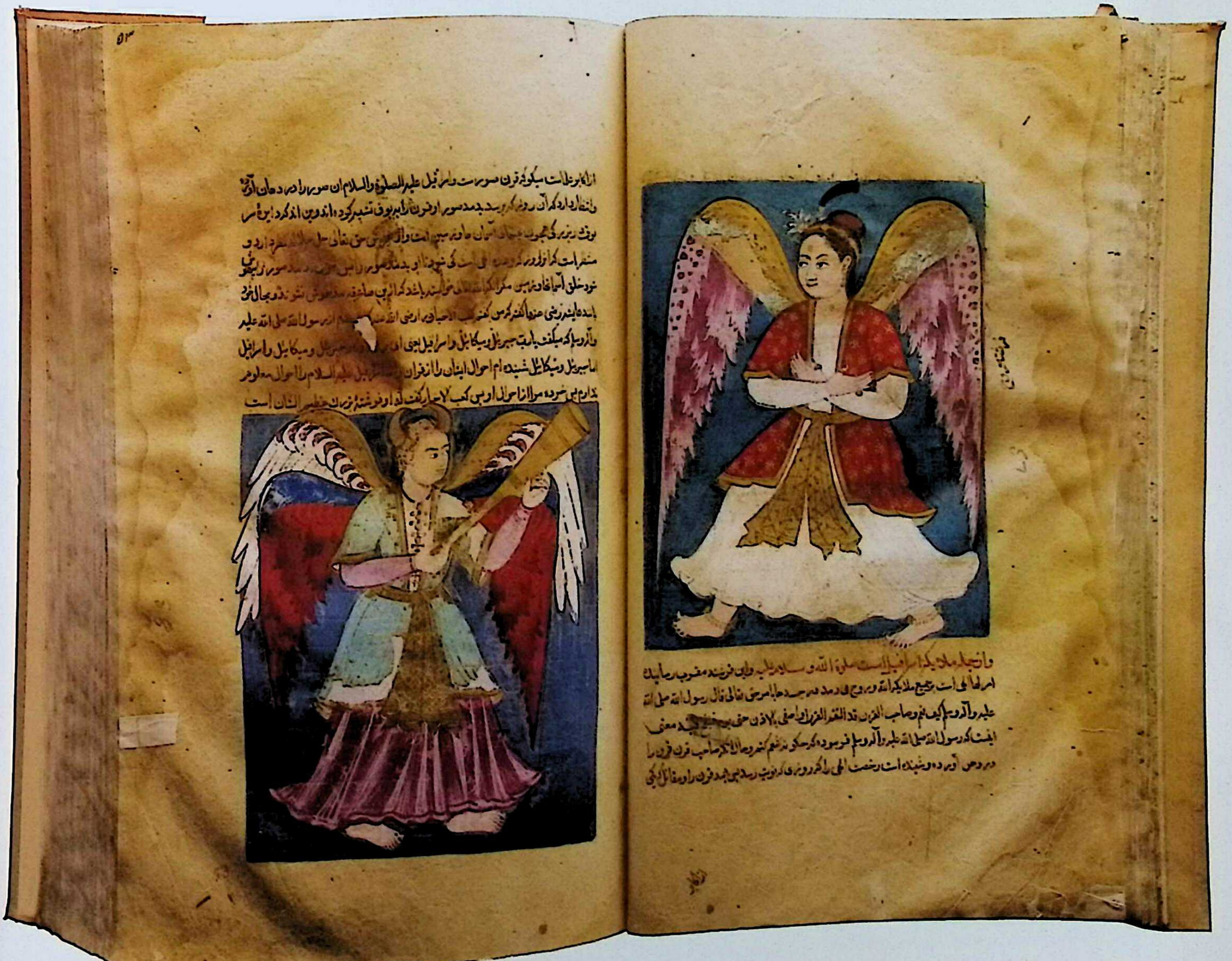
Gibriel is the bearer of the commandments of God. Israfil arrives with a horn on the day of Judgement (kayamat), when all the dead come to life and the heavens turn into earth and earth turns into the heavens.

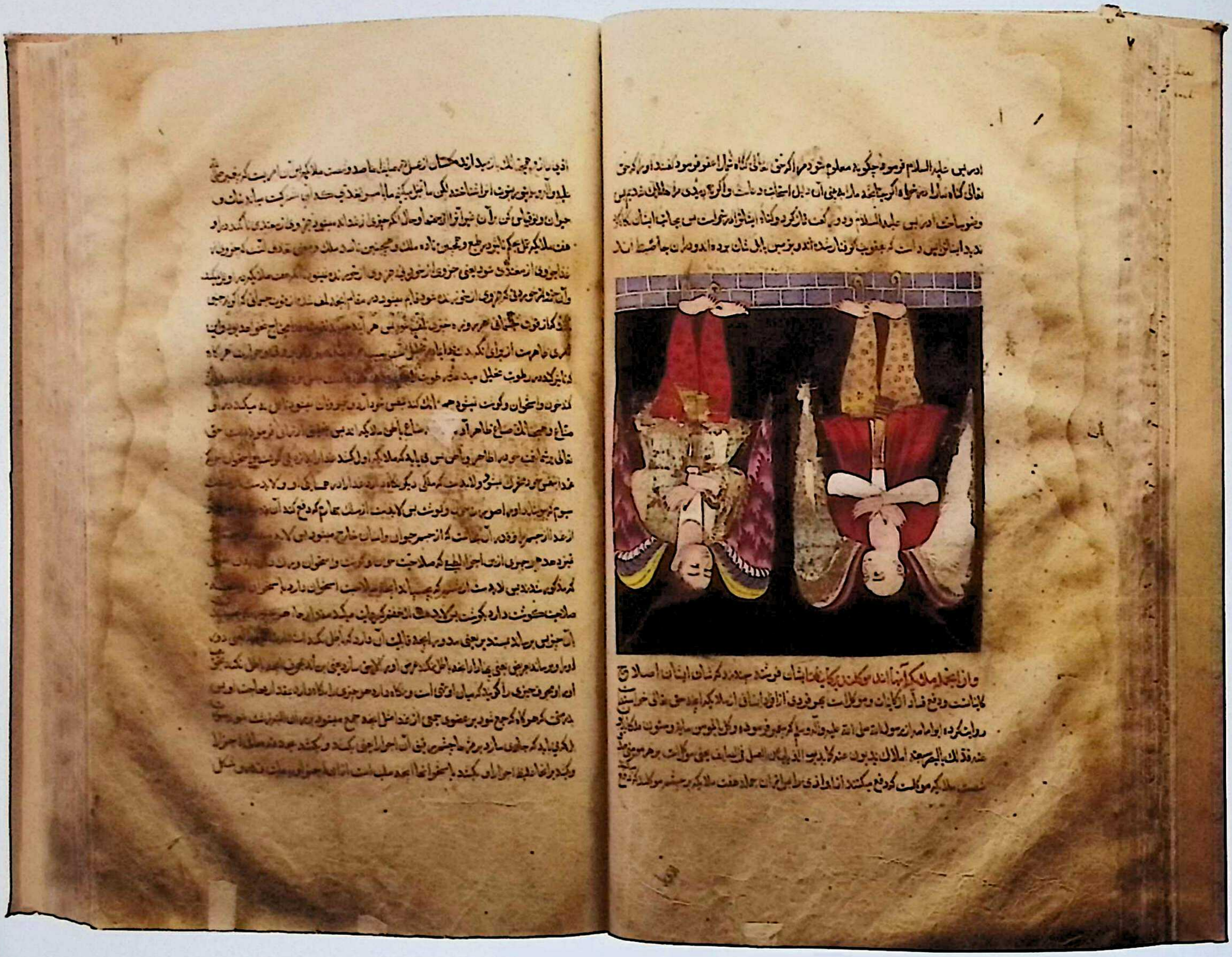
Two angels, Harud and Marud, were sent to earth to test their resistance to the forces of evil, but through the misuse of magic, fell prey to these very forces. They were made to hang upside down in a well in Babel till the Day of Atonement.



4
Azab Kawakib: The Horse Constellation.

**5**
Ferishta Israfil, Ferishta Gibriel.





6
Ferishta Harud, Ferishta Marud.

The angels are painted sumptuously. They wear flowing robes and sashes tied in the typically Deccani fashion, at the centre. The artist lavishes attention on their wings, infusing them with chromatic drama and evoking volume and texture through graded tones and shading.

### Sufliyyat: The Terrestrial Realm

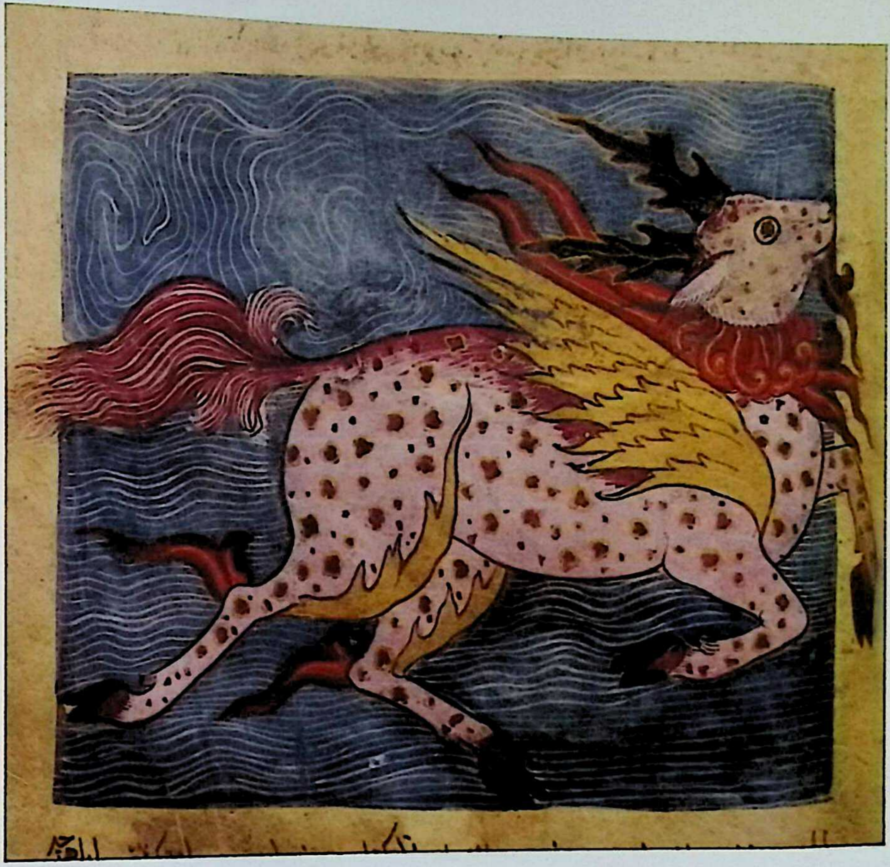
This section moves from the description of the seas, islands and their inhabitants, to land and its geographical features—mountains, rivers—and then to botanical life, the animal kingdom, insects, and strange people and their habitats. In this section, descriptions of places and people flow into 'aja'ib tales.

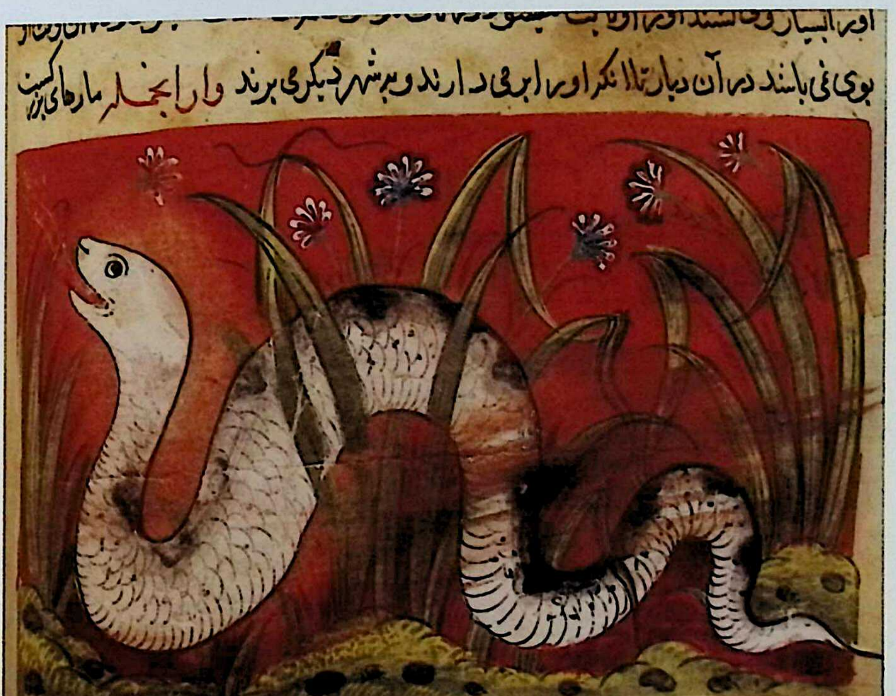
*Adam i-Abi: Water-People* (figure 7)

Al-Qazwini speaks of a tribe of water-people who lived on an unnamed remote island. Two were given as presents to a king, and the child they begot him was a water-cow with wings.

7
Adam i-Abi: Water-People, detail showing water-cow.

8
Marhaiye Buzurg: Big Snake.





The semi-aquatic human pair are seen floating in a sea depicted through stylized conventions followed throughout the work. The water-cow, their love child with a king, is a creature of the imagination, its pink mottled skin recalling the representation of divs in Persian miniatures.

*Marhaiye Buzurg: Big Snake* (figure 8)
Al-Qazwini says this large snake emerges from streams, and can strangle bison and elephants, and twine itself around trees and rocks. It can swallow large animals, and when the bones crack in its stomach, the noise can be heard from afar. It swims in areas where one can find pearls and rubies. It can capsize boats so boatmen avoid areas in which it swims. There are many 'aja'ib tales linked with this snake, for sailors beat drums and lower containers with animal feed to placate the dangerous creature.

The tales around this creature are left out of the illustration, which focuses on the snake slithering innocuously through tall grass against a red background (used for several illustrations in this section). The image is riveting, for the tall weeds seem to have this dangerous reptile in their snare. While the background is flat and unmodulated, the snake's body is shaded to reveal its scales.

*Timsakh: Reptile* (figure 9)
According to al-Qazwini, this reptile is repulsive, with a long tongue and large eyes. Its back is hard like stone, such that a rod of iron cannot hurt it, and it has no vertebrae.

The artist has reimagined the prosaic description of a reptile into a fantastical creature, the stuff of 'aja'ib mysteries. The image is richly patterned, the brushwork is precise and hard-edged, and the use of red reinforces its drama.

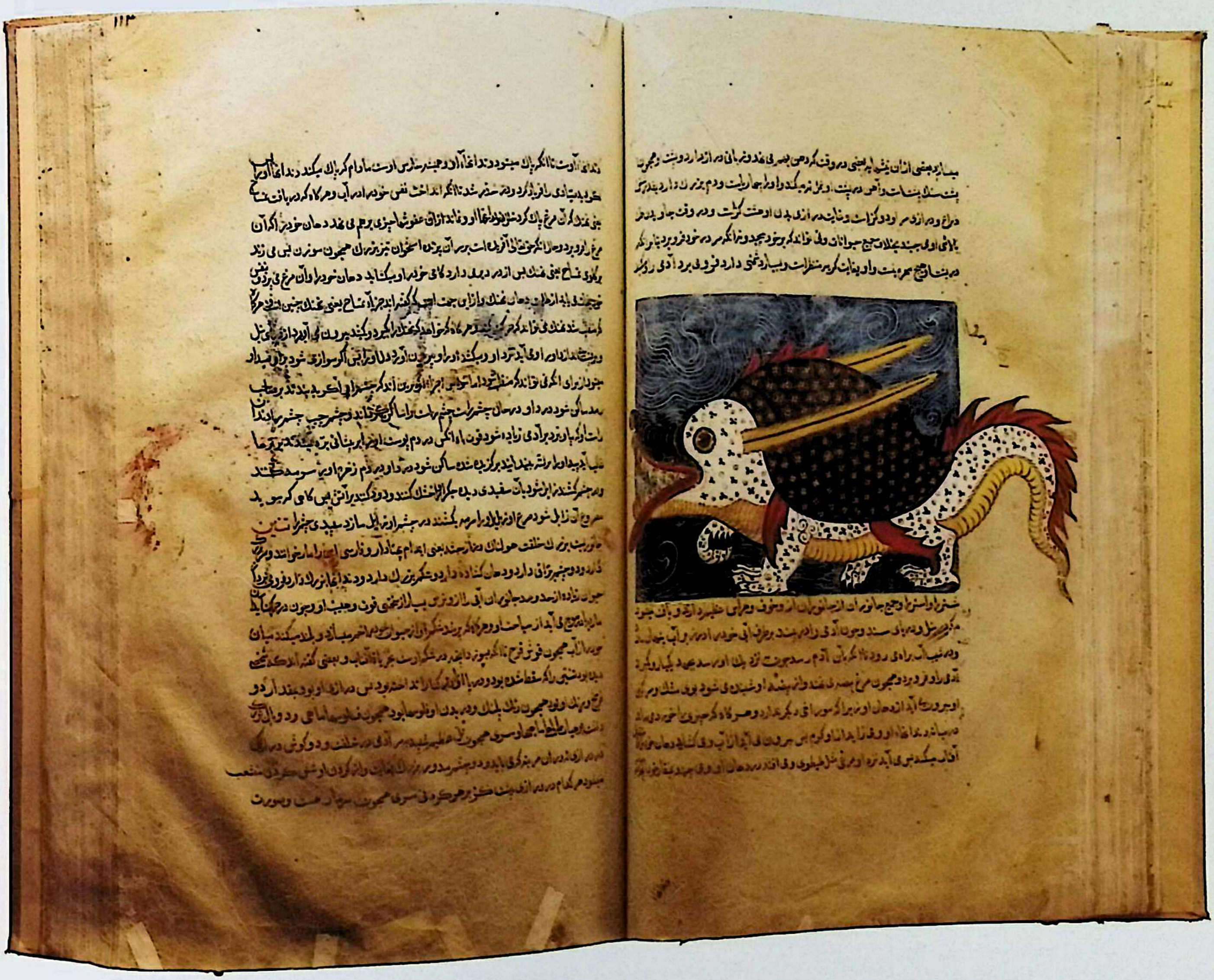
*Narjal (Coconut Palm) and Moz (Banana Tree)* (figure 10)
According to al-Qazwini, Narjal is an Indian fruit tree that is produced by the people of Hejaz (Arab lands). It grows in humid areas, its water is sweet and on its fruits is found a silken fibre from which yarn and thread can be made.

The banana tree (Moz), he says, grows in hot areas and on islands. Its leaves are broad and long like those of the palm, but are square in shape. The tree is the height of a man. Bananas grow from its skin.

These illustrations break away from stylized representations of the palm and banana trees, common in Indian miniatures, to offer imagery that is very naturalistic and free of visual stereotypes. Creepers grow from beneath the coconut tree, adding decorative detail. The third tree depicted on these pages is the orange tree.

* * *

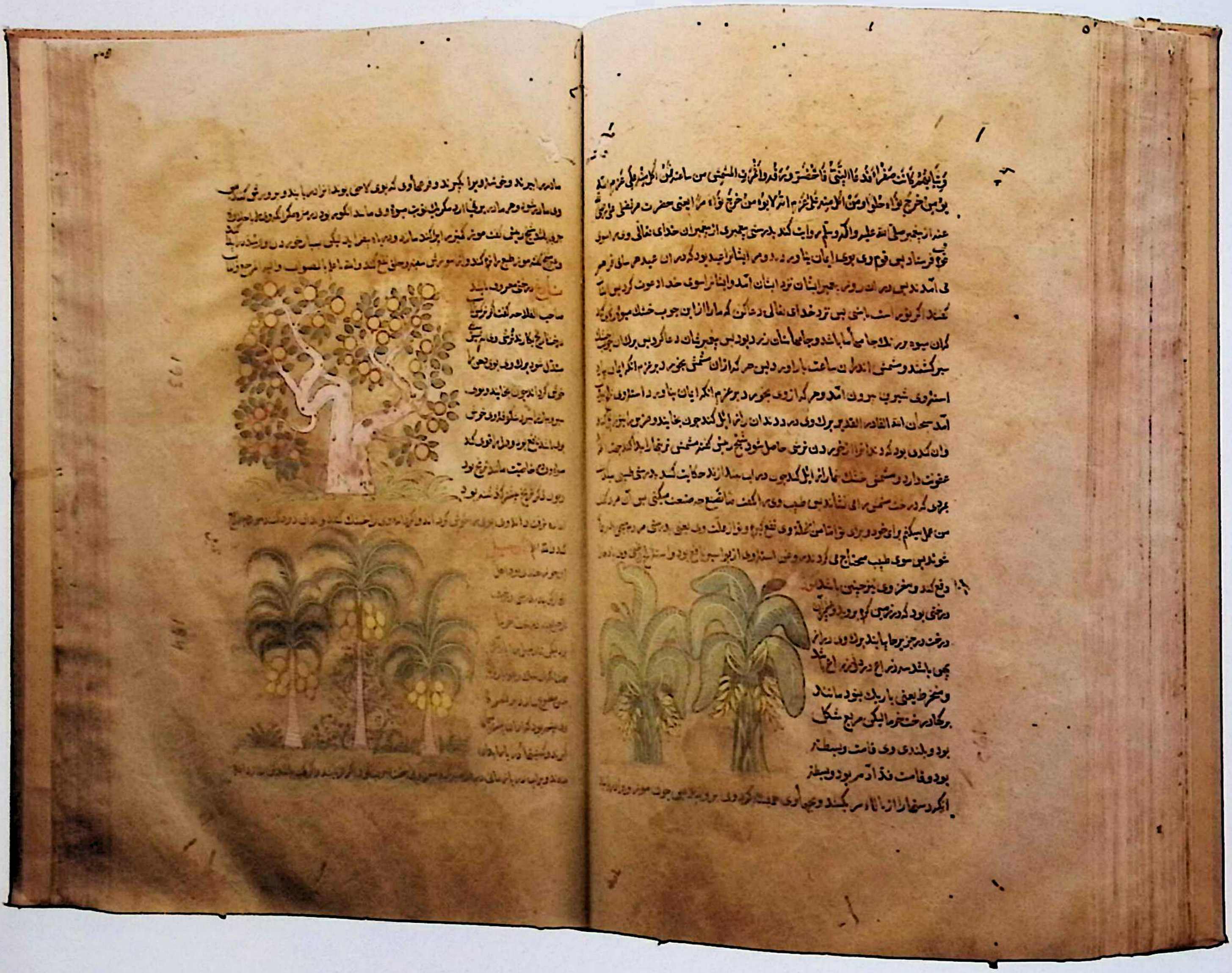
The images above give but a small glimpse into a very rich manuscript that is one of the treasures of the National Museum's Deccani collection. Although its finish is not equivalent to the most celebrated 17th-century Bijapuri works, it is an accomplished production. The unevenness of its style, with some folios reflecting contemporary styles and others recalling that of late 16th-century manuscripts, could be on account



9

Timsakh: Reptile.

**10**
Narjal (Coconut Palm), Moz (Banana Tree).



of different hands at work—likely for a manuscript of this size. The less laboured execution with limited layering was perhaps a decision that was dictated by the constraints of a workshop of limited size that had to reproduce over 400 illustrations. However, what is lacking in detailing is more than made up for by the imaginativeness of the illustrations and the sheer exuberance that characterizes them. For this reason alone the manuscript deserves to be better known.

**Acknowledgements**
I am grateful to Dr Syed Akhtar Husain for his help with the translation of the manuscript on which this article is based, and to Dr Kavita Singh for her comments and feedback.

## Notes

1 For a comprehensive discussion on this subject see Karin Ruhrdanz, “Illustrated Persian *Ajaib al Makhluqat* Manuscripts and Their Function in Early Modern Times”, in Andrew J. Newman, ed., *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 35–42.

2 Travis Zadeh, “The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the ‘Ajā’ib Tradition”, *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, 13:1 (2010), pp. 21–48.

3 Since they bore the same title, al-Tusi and al-Qazwini’s texts appear to have been seen to be interchangeable. The Walters Art Museum, for instance, has in its collection a manuscript of the *‘Aja’ib al-Makhluqat wa Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat* (W.593) whose authorship is attributed to both al-Qazwini and al-Tusi.

4 There are several manuscripts of the *‘Aja’ib* known to have been commissioned in the Deccan. Three Deccan copies exist in the British Library, one of which was commissioned by a courtier attached to the court of ‘Adil Shah. See Emma Flatt, “The Authorship and Significance of the *Nujūm al-‘Ulūm*: A Sixteenth-Century Astrological Encyclopaedia from Bijapur”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (2011), pp. 222–44.

5 Noor Jehan Begum, *Ibn Nishati krut Phoolban* (Hyderabad: Milind Prakashan, 2003).

6 Flatt, “Authorship”.

7 Roy P. Mottahedeh, “‘Aja’ib in the Thousand and One Nights”, in Richard G. Hovannisian and George Sabagh, eds., *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

8 This article is based on the translation and reading of this manuscript by Dr Syed Akhtar Husain, Professor, Centre of Persian and Central Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. I am very grateful to him for his generosity with his time and scholarship.

9 For a detailed study of the sources of al-Qazwini’s arguments, see Zadeh, “The Wiles of Creation”.

10 National Museum, New Delhi, Acc. no. 58.48.

11 I base this on Dr Syed Akhtar Husain’s translation of the introduction.

12 Gijs Kruijtzer, “Bari Sahib bint Muhammad Qutb Shah”, in David Thomas et al., eds., *Christian Muslim Relations, A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 11 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011).

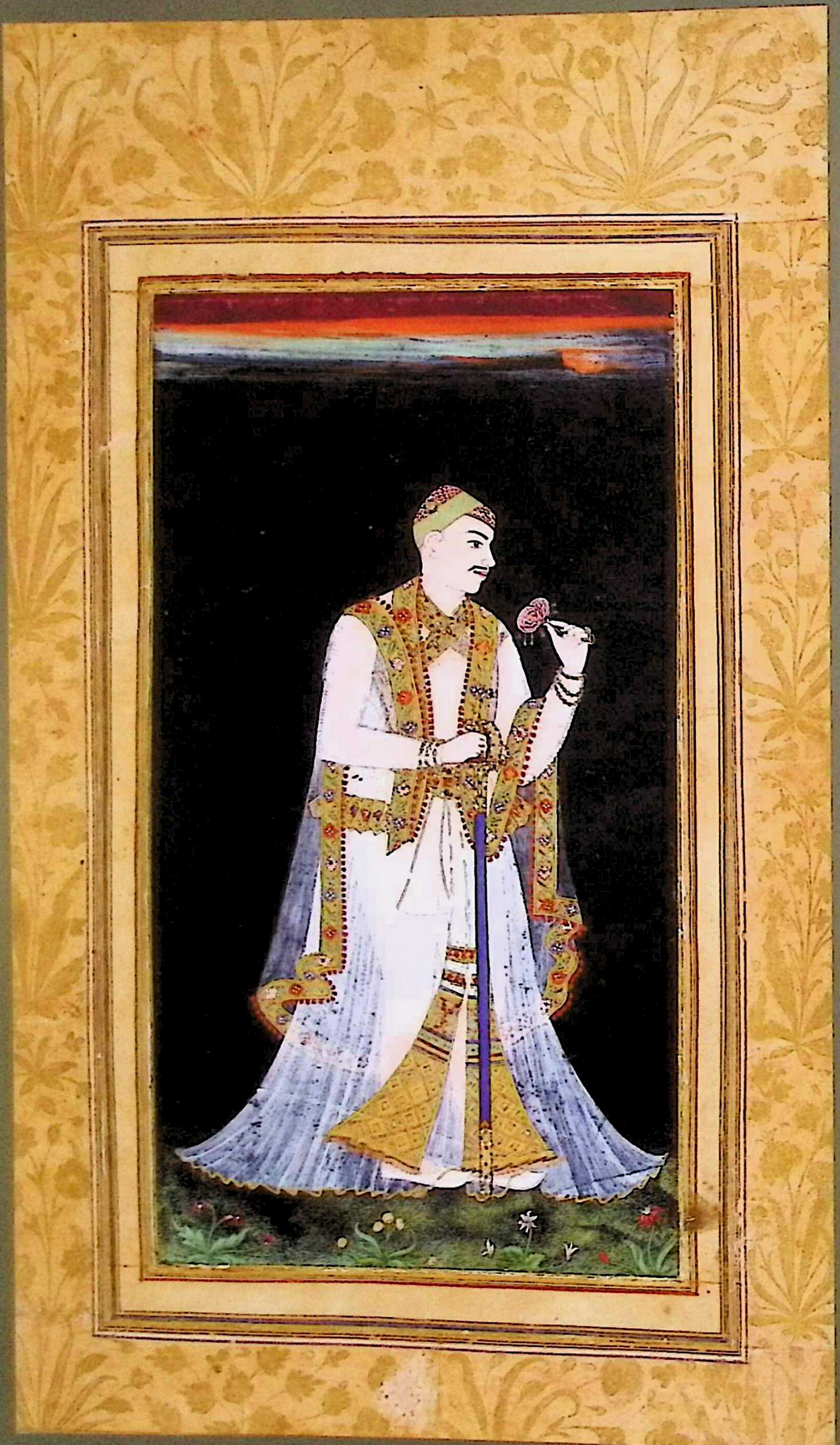
13 Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500–1700, Opulence and Fantasy* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), p. 228.

14 Ibid.

15 See the well-known painting by this artist, “Dervish Receiving a Visitor”, in the collection of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ms. Douce. Or. B.2. f. 11, discussed in Haidar and Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India*.

16 Ibid., p. 250.

17 The reading of the text is based on Dr Syed Akhtar Husain’s translation.



# Slave, Sultan, Scholar

## Muhammad Qutb Shah and the Royal Library of Golconda

### *Laura Weinstein*

The 'Adil Shahi, Qutb Shahi and Nizam Shahi courts were home to vibrant cultures of the book, though we have only in recent years begun to come to a thorough understanding of their natures.[1] The impressions of seals of Deccani rulers in manuscripts they owned have helped us to understand their collecting practices, while manuscripts made in Hyderabad, Bijapur and other cities have shed light on royal and elite patronage as well as on modes of book production and their development over time. Certain key moments have already been delineated in some detail: for example, the patronage of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II of Bijapur around the start of the 17th century.[2]

In terms of scale, the production and collection of manuscripts within the Deccan sultanates was tiny in comparison to that at the imperial Mughal court. The highly organized nature of the Mughal kitabkhana was also unique. But still there are notable points of connection between Mughal and Deccani libraries, such as the many manuscripts of Persian poetry that belonged to both. And, for a brief period in the early 17th century, the book culture of these regions shared another feature: rulers adopted the habit of making notations of ownership in their manuscripts. More specifically, while Jahangir was inscribing the notes he has become well-known for in the volumes in his library, Muhammad Qutb Shah of Golconda (r. 1612–26) was doing the same in his (figure 1).[3]

Rulers in the Islamic world did not customarily pen inscriptions in their books.[4] That it occurred in two polities within India in the early 17th century suggests that there was something unique about book culture in South Asia at that time. The notes left by Muhammad Qutb Shah offer a point of entry into this topic, as well as a source of valuable information on a little-studied sultan.

The cultural achievements of Muhammad Qutb Shah, the sixth ruler of the Qutb Shahi dynasty, are generally overshadowed by those of his longer-ruling predecessor (the poet-king Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, r. 1580–1612) and successor ('Abdullah Qutb Shah, r. 1626–72). Muhammad Quli, founder of Hyderabad, and 'Abdullah are beloved for the buildings they constructed in and around Hyderabad, for their sponsorship of Muharram rituals in which both Hindu and Muslim members of

1

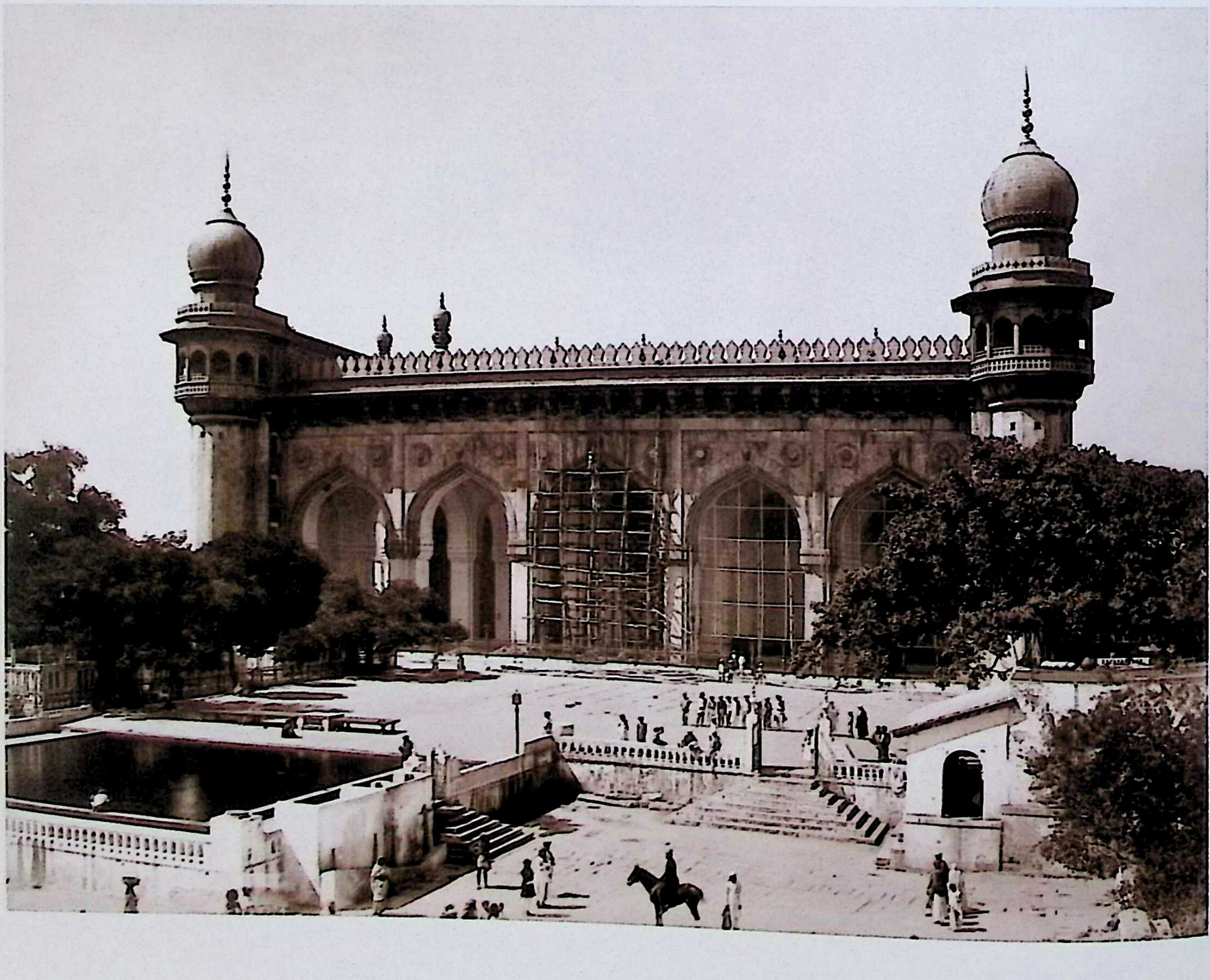
Portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah, Golconda, 1650–1700. Ink, colour and gold on paper; 21.3 x 11.9 cm. Private collection.

society participated, and for their use and patronage of the then new literary language of Dakhni Urdu.

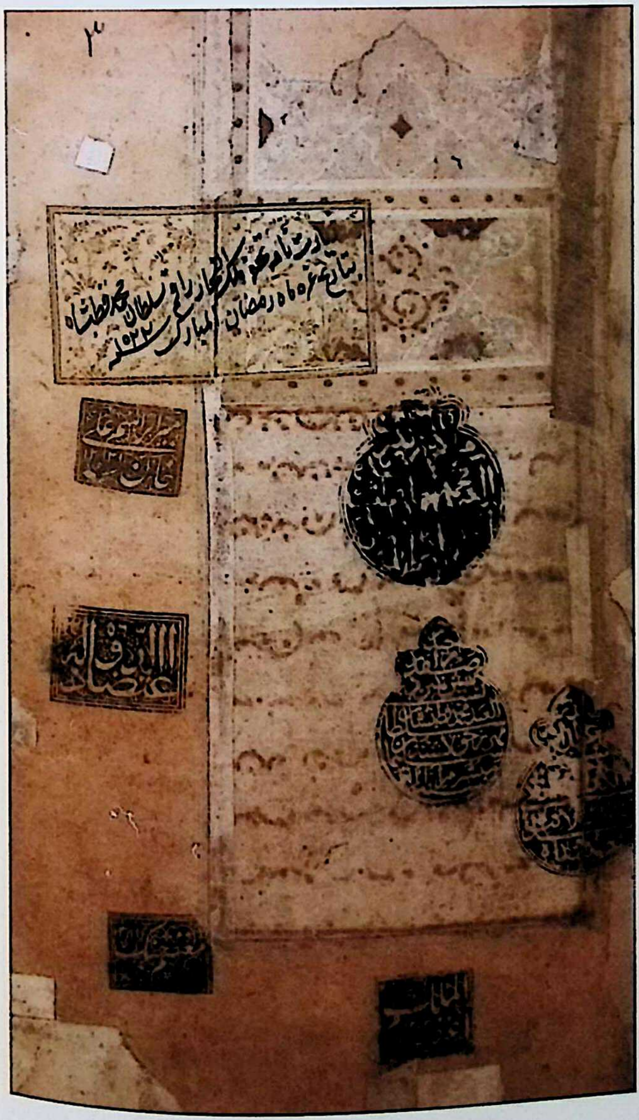
The cultural career of Muhammad Qutb Shah appears to have been quite different. In architecture, his most significant contribution is the Mecca Masjid, a large congregational mosque near the Charminar that bears little resemblance to other Qutb Shahi monuments (figure 2).[5] With regard to ritual life, there is little evidence that he was involved with the Muharram rituals that were central to public life in and around Hyderabad at this time. His name is not found, for example, in any of the area's many ashurkhanas (houses of mourning used by Shi'is during Muharram). What survives of Muhammad's own poetry is mainly in Persian rather than Dakhni, and his reign saw the production of fewer new works of Dakhni literature than that of his predecessor or successor. The great Deccan historian H.K. Sherwani described Dakhni literature during Muhammad's reign as "almost somnolescent".[6]

The reign of Muhammad Qutb Shah may have been culturally discontinuous with those of the rulers before and after him, but it was not culturally barren. Muhammad

2
Mecca Masjid, Hyderabad, begun c. 1617 and completed (by Aurangzeb) in 1692. Photograph: Deen Dayal, 1880s. Image in the public domain.



focused a great deal of attention on the intellectual life of his court, which was flourishing under conditions of relative peace and prosperity. Historical documents and manuscript colophons demonstrate that he commissioned the production of many new texts on science, medicine, Sufism, law and literature, in addition to ordering translations of numerous existing works. It was under his sponsorship that the *Tarikh-i Muhammad Qutb Shah*, the most important source for early Qutb Shahi history, was compiled. He also commissioned new copies of important Persian and Arabic texts, and when something could not be produced in Hyderabad he collected it, sometimes from faraway lands. In one instance, an Arabic manuscript on Islamic law was obtained in Medina by a courtier who used it to prepare a new copy. This was presented to the sultan, who ordered it translated into Persian.[7]



3
*Ziyaratnama*, undated. Ink, colour and gold on paper. Telangana State Archaeology Museum, Ms. 2721. Courtesy Telangana State Archaeology Museum, Hyderabad.

Muhammad Qutb Shah was collecting books even before he became sultan in 1612,[8] and by at least 1613 he had begun inscribing notes on his manuscripts, often placing them just above or next to an impression of his seal. In the autumn of 1613 he wrote a note on the first folio of a *Ziyaratnama* (figure 3), a book of prayers to be said at the time of visiting the graves of the Ahl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet Muhammad).[9] The manuscript, which is undated, is inscribed on gold-sprinkled paper and richly illuminated. Muhammad's note reads: "Gift of malik al-tujjar. Written by Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah on the first day of the blessed month of Ramadan in the year 1022 [October 15, 1613]."

This short note seems self-explanatory. It simply records the receipt of this manuscript as a gift and the identity of the giver: a high-ranking courtier holding the title "malik al-tujjar" (prince of merchants). It does not at first seem altogether different from a note of Jahangir's which he wrote in a *Bustan* of Sa'di a few years earlier: "God is almighty. On the fifth of Azar year I of the accession [this book] entered the library of this supplicant at the Divine Court. Written by Nur al-Din Jahangir, son of Akbar Padshah. Year 1014 Hijra [1605]."[10] Jahangir's note records the accession of a book into the royal library rather than the receipt of the book as a gift, but both rulers have given information about the acquisition of a new book. What is more strikingly different about the two inscriptions is that only the Mughal ruler's notation contains self-glorifying formulas. He calls himself "this supplicant at the Divine Court", mentions not only his name but also that of his renowned father, and claims that the book was acquired in the year of his accession to the Mughal throne. The accession year was considered auspicious and therefore reference to it is thought to have been more convention than fact.[11]

Muhammad Qutb Shah's *Ziyaratnama* inscription carries few overtones of royalty other than the title "Sultan" itself. The date included is not a conventional one but rather the actual date on which he wrote the inscription. The note does, however, have a feature that conveys royal prestige: illumination. It is surrounded by thin gold and black borders and contains gold floral illumination between the lines of text. This gold decoration appears on virtually every inscription attributable to Muhammad Qutb Shah and may well have been added at Muhammad's order. The consistent way it was applied is perhaps an indication that all the illumination was executed at one time. It is not difficult to imagine that Muhammad, late in his reign, ordered his book workshop to go through all the manuscripts he had inscribed and illuminate his notes.

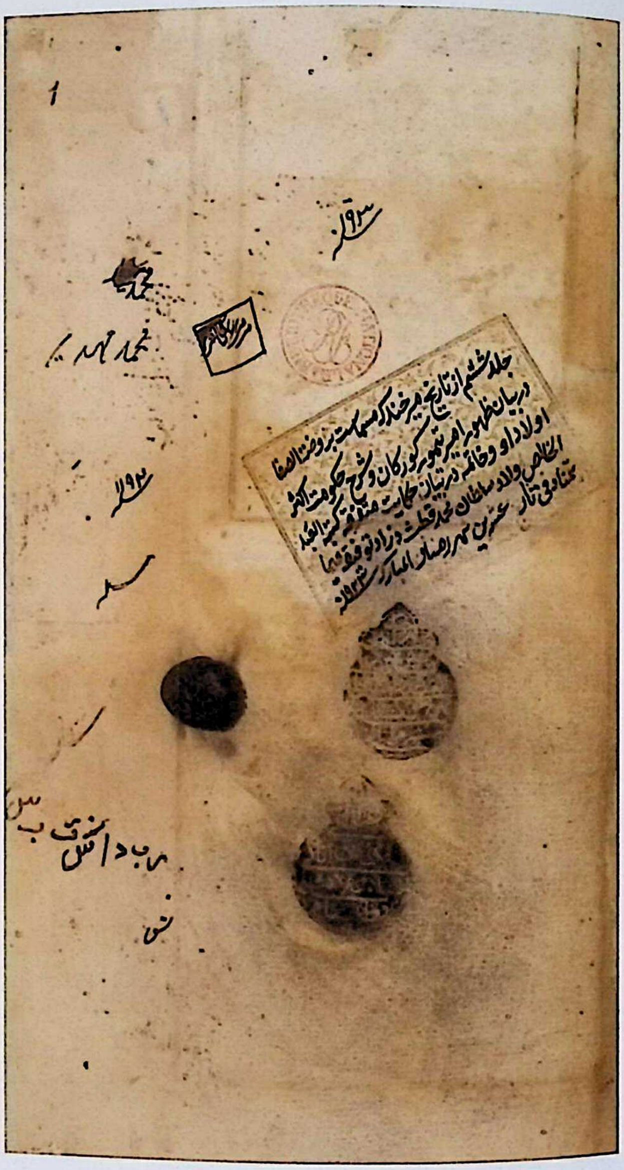
Although we cannot definitively say that Muhammad Qutb Shah himself ordered the illumination to enhance his inscriptions, there is no doubt that it was he who decided, around 1614, to change the way he would compose these notes in the future. By October of that year he had begun to add the kinds of royal and pious phrases that appear in Jahangir's notes, a practice he would consistently follow thereafter.

Muhammad seems to have spent a good part of October 23, 1614, in his library. He wrote notes in at least two volumes of a copy of the *Rauzat al-Safa,* a world history in Persian by Timurid historian Mir Khwand.[12] The volumes are illustrated and dated, and may have been made in Golconda itself at Muhammad's order. His notes in these two volumes are remarkably similar to one another. Each is brief (four or five lines), diagonally oriented and appears directly above an impression of his seal. If one needs any further evidence that the notes were written in immediate succession, one may look at the fact that in each one Muhammad makes the same mistake in the spelling of the author's name. The inscriptions in Volume Four and Volume Six (figure 4) are, respectively:

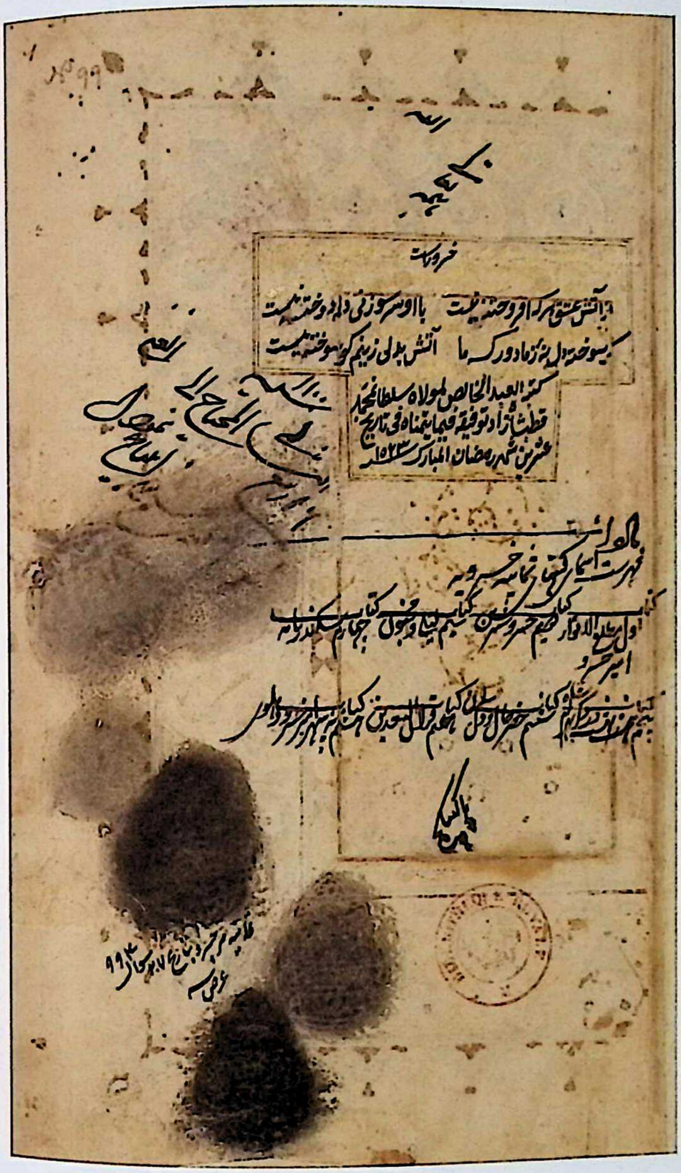
> Volume four of the history of Mir Khand [sic] called *Rauzat al-Safa* that narrates the exploits of kings who were contemporary with the Bani Abbas [Abbasids]. Written by the pure slave of his master Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah, may God increase his favour, on the 20th of the blessed Ramadan 1023.

> Volume six of the history of Mir Khand [sic] called *Rauzat al-Safa* that narrates the rise of Amir Timur Gurkan and the rule of most of his descendants, and a conclusion [khatima] that narrates miscellaneous stories. Written by the pure slave of his master Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah, may God increase his favour, on the 20th of the blessed Ramadan 1023.

Before delving into the addition of royal and religious phrases to these inscriptions, let us look at their general nature. Their brevity and similarity to one another—both in content and form—suggest that the sultan was approaching his task with a rather workaday attitude, like that of a professional librarian. It is as if he had a whole stack



4
Mir Khwand, *Rauzat al-Safa*, Volume Six, possibly Golconda, 1604. Ink and gold on paper. Bibliotheque nationale de France, Supplement Persan 151 B. Courtesy Bibliotheque nationale de France.



5
Amir Khusrau, *Samaniyya*, possibly Golconda, 1570s. Ink and gold on paper. Bibliotheque nationale de France, Supplement Persan 627. Courtesy Bibliotheque nationale de France.

of volumes before him and wanted to work through them all in a single sitting. It is rare indeed that we get such a clear impression of how a 17th-century sultan chose to spend his free time, and rarer still that we find him doing something as ordinary as registering books.

But perhaps this was not as ordinary as it seems. In the second sentence of each note we see Muhammad beginning to use the notes to articulate his royal and religious identity and imprint it onto the manuscripts. He does so with two phrases that hereafter become standard parts of his inscriptions. One is the Arabic phrase meaning "may God increase his favour", which appears right after Muhammad's name and conveys confidence and power, both kingly features. The other is the phrase "al-'abd al-khalis li-maula" (the pure slave of his master).[13] The term "master" is a reference to 'Ali, who is often called Maula in South Asia. This is especially true of Golconda, where the Qutb Shahi rulers treated "Maula Ali" as their dynastic protector. The shrine to 'Ali on the top of "Maula Ali Hill" in Hyderabad, built by Ibrahim Qutb Shah in 1578, stands as a testament to this dedication to their "master".[14]

This note was not, therefore, the first time that a Qutb Shahi ruler had referred to himself as a slave of 'Ali. For example, one sees nearly the same phrase (ghulam-i Murtaza 'Ali) on the coins of Ibrahim Qutb Shah (r. 1550–80), and again (ghulam-i 'Ali) in one of Muhammad Quli's earliest architectural inscriptions.[15] It was also frequently used by Safavid rulers. In putting this language into his inscriptions, Muhammad Qutb Shah was identifying himself as a Muslim, a Shi'i, and a member of the Qutb Shahi dynasty. With these additional phrases, Muhammad had converted his notes from factual documentation into vehicles by which to express religious and dynastic affiliation.

The same formulations appear in another manuscript that Muhammad inscribed that same day: a copy of Amir Khusrau's *Samaniyya*, a text containing eight masnavis by the great Indo-Persian poet of the 14th and 15th centuries.[16] It is an older manuscript than the *Rauzat al-Safa*, undated but with an inventory mark dated 1585 and seals of Ibrahim as well as Muhammad Qutb Shah on the first page. Muhammad's note (figure 5) appears towards the top of the page where he wrote out a ruba'i (quatrain) by Amir Khusrau under the words "Khusrau ra ast" (Khusrau's poem). Immediately below are the now familiar words: "Written by the pure slave of his master Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah, may God increase his favour, on the 20th of the blessed Ramadan 1023 [October 23, 1614]."

The illuminations within the main body of this manuscript share several striking features with those of a manuscript of the *Zakhira-yi Khwarazmshahi*, the colophon of which places its production in Golconda in 1572. As both contain, for example, unusual sarlawhs in which multicoloured birds appear within the illumination and impressions of the seal of Muhammad's grandfather, Ibrahim Qutb Shah, it appears likely that the *Samaniyya* was also produced in Golconda in the 1570s.[17] By beginning his inscription on this heirloom manuscript with a few lines of poetry by Amir Khusrau, Muhammad Qutb Shah was demonstrating his mastery of the poet's work. His inscription in a copy of the *Kulliyat-i Jami*, written just a few days later (28 Ramadan 1023/October 31, 1614), also includes a few lines of poetry by that author.

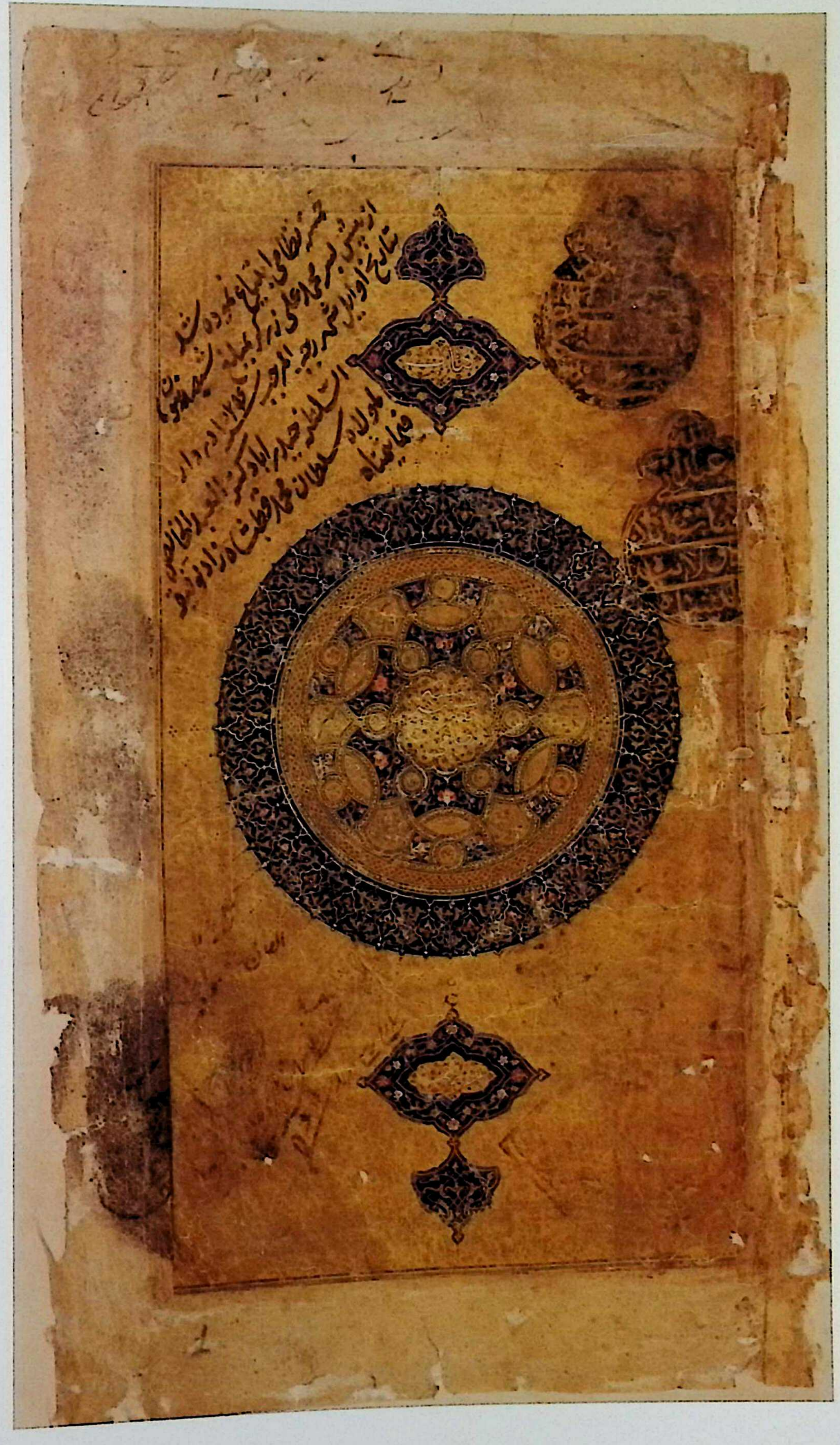
The placement and orientation of these inscriptions is unique and worth noting. The quatrain by Amir Khusrau and the inscription that follows, like Muhammad's note in the *Jami* manuscript, are contained within an illuminated box that is almost perfectly aligned with the borders around the illumination and text on the verso of the page. As such, the distinction between the inscriptions and the text of the manuscript itself becomes blurred. Over time, as Muhammad's notes became longer and gradually came to inhabit nearly the full area of the text block, it began to seem as if they were simply part of the manuscript. In contrast to Jahangir and Shah Jahan's notes, which were prominent in placement and scale but essentially informal, Muhammad Qutb Shah's notes were formal but actually became less prominent over time.

This pattern applies to the inscriptions that contain scholarly or poetic content but not to those like that in the *Ziyaratnama*, which contain only the name of the text and author or the details of the manuscript's accession, in addition to Muhammad Qutb Shah's name and titles. These notes continue to consist of just a few lines, written on a diagonal. An inscription of this kind from 1615 appears in the most artistically important manuscript to have been inscribed by the sultan: a *Khamsa* of Nizami made in 1431 for the Timurid ruler Shahrukh (r. 1405–1447) (figure 6).[18] Written diagonally in the corner of an illuminated page, the Qutb Shahi sultan's note proclaims:

> *Khamsa* of Nizami, purchased from Muhammad 'Ali, the son of a goldsmith, for the sum of 300 toman. On the first of the honourable month of Rajab in the year 1024 [July 27, 1615] in the capital of the sultanate of Hyderabad, written by the pure slave of his master, Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah, may God increase his favour.

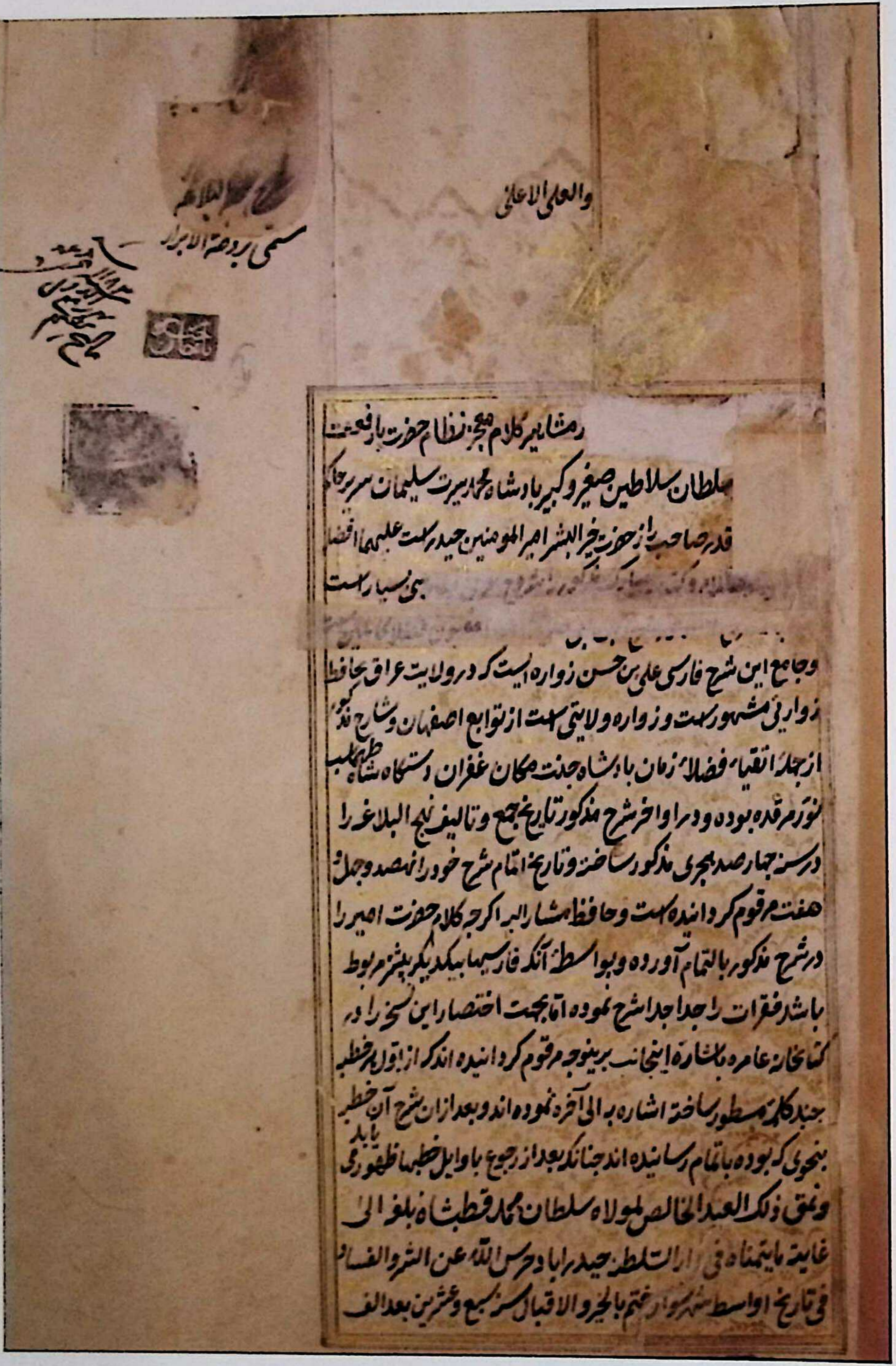
In addition to the features we have come to associate with Muhammad Qutb Shah's inscriptions, this note's curious reference to toman, a currency used in Persia but not in India, suggests that the manuscript may have been purchased abroad.[19]

To return to the more scholarly inscriptions, as their length increased they came to resemble manuscript prefaces. The note that Muhammad inscribed in September of 1615, for example, on a 15th-century copy of the *Masnaviyat-i Jamali* illustrates this development.[20] Over the space of a full 13 lines, Muhammad presents his knowledge of the identity of the author Pir Jamal al-Din Ardistani (the leader of the Jamaliyya, a sub-branch of the Suhravardi order) and of his works. He also lists the titles of other works by Jamali of which he has a copy. Jamali lived during the period of the Qara Qoyunlu, the Turkman tribal federation known as the "Black Sheep", to whom



6

*Khamsa* of Nizami, Herat, 1431. Ink, colour and gold on paper. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Inv. no. VR-1000. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum/ photograph by Vladimir Terebenin.


نهج البلاغه
مسمی بروضة الابرار
والعلی الاعلی

ز مشاهیر کلام معجز نظام حضرت بارفعت
سلطان سلاطین صغیر و کبیر بادشاه جمجاه سیرت سلیمان سریر جا
قدر صاحب از حضرت خیر البشر امیر المومنین حیدر است علیه افضل
بی بسیار است
[illegible]
وجامع این شرح فارسی علی بن حسن زواره ایست که در ولایت عراق بحافظ
زواری مشهور است و زواره ولایتی است از توابع اصفهان و شارح مذکور
از جملهٔ اتقیاء فضلاء زمان بادشاه جنت مکان غفران دستگاه شاه طهماسب
نور مرقده بوده و در اواخر شرح مذکور تاریخ جمع و تالیف نهج البلاغه را
در سنه چهار صد هجری مذکور ساخته و تاریخ اتمام شرح خود را نهصد و چهل
هفت مرقوم گردانیده است و حافظ مشار الیه اگرچه کلام حضرت امیر را
در شرح مذکور بالتمام آورده و بواسطهٔ آنکه فارسیها بیکدیگر بیشتر مربوط
باشد فقرات را جدا جدا شرح نموده اما بجهت اختصار این نسخه را در
کتابخانه عامره باشارهٔ اینجانب برینوجه مرقوم گردانیده اندکه از اوایل هر خطبه
چند کلمه مسطور ساخته اشاره به الی آخره نموده اند و بعد از ان شرح آن خطبه
بنحوی که بوده باتمام رسانیده اند چنانکه بعد از رجوع باوایل خطبها ظهور می یابد
ونمق ذلک العبد الخالص لمولاه سلطان محمد قطبشاه بلغه الی
غایة ما یتمناه فی دار السلطنة حیدر اباد حرس الله عن الشر والفساد
فی تاریخ اواسط شهر شوال ختم بالخیر والاقبال سنه سبع وعشرین بعد الف

7
*Rauzat al-Abrar*, Golconda, c. 1618. Ink and gold on paper. Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, H.I. 48. Courtesy Salar Jung Museum.

Muhammad Qutb Shah traced his ancestry, and that connection may have been meaningful to Muhammad. Whether or not it was this connection that prompted him to study Jamali's work so deeply, the sultan clearly invested great time into this and other texts by Jamali.

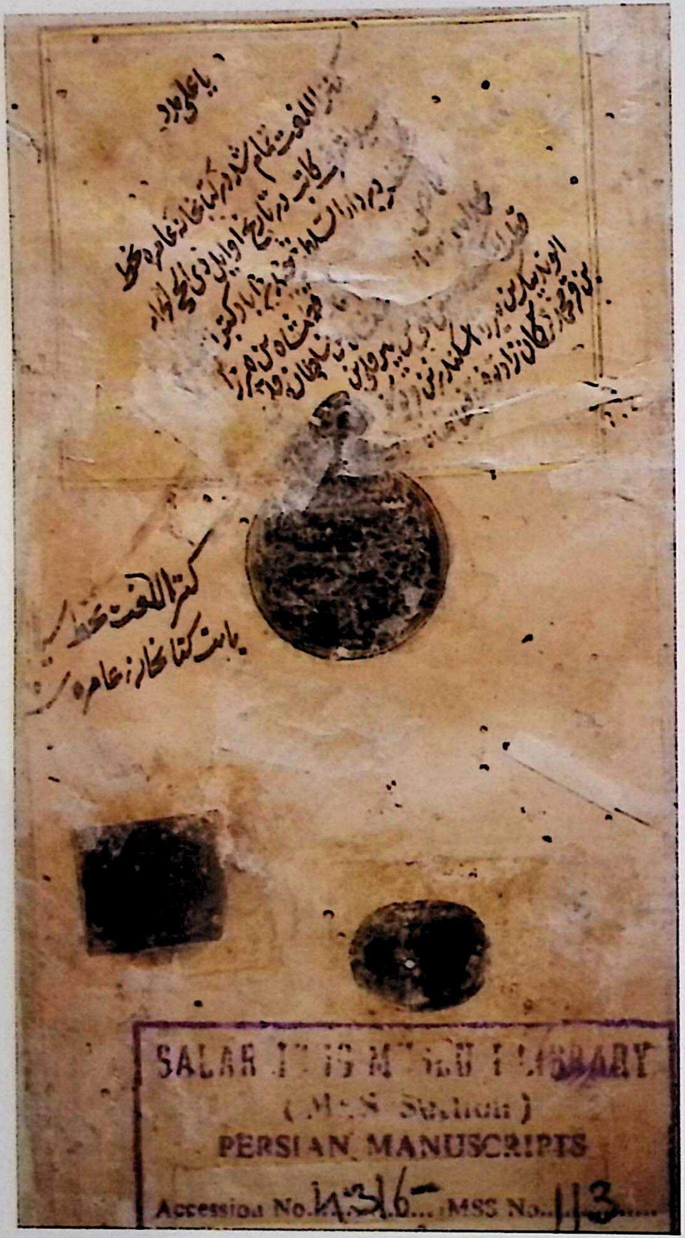
There are two other notes that are, like this one, deeply scholarly and lengthy. One is an inscription of 19 lines on a *Rauzat al-Abrar* in 1618 (figure 7) that was inscribed just a few weeks after the manuscript's completion:[21]

> The compiler of this Persian commentary is 'Ali ibn Hasan Zavvarah who is known in the province of Iraq as Hafiz Zavvari. Zavvarah is a dependency of Isfahan. The aforementioned commentator was among the devout scholars of the age of the heaven-dwelling Padshah Shah Tahmasp (may his grave be illumined). At the end of the aforementioned commentary he noted the compilation and editing of the *Nahj al-balagha* as 400 AH and recorded the date of completion of his own commentary as 947. The above-mentioned Hafiz although he included Hazrat Amir ['Ali]'s words in their entirety in the commentary, because the Persian [translations] mostly run on into each other, the sections have been explained in the commentary individually. But for the sake of abridgment, at my command this copy in the royal library was done in such a way that at the beginning of every khutba [sermon] some words have been underlined and an indication of the end [is also made]. After that the commentary on that khutba is given in its entirety in a way that is clear from looking at the beginning of the khutba. The pure slave of his master Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah, may he reach his extreme, in the *dar al-saltana* Hyderabad.[22]

It seems that Muhammad ordered the copyist of this volume, who worked in the royal library, to reorganize the text in a manner the sultan found more useful. A similarly elaborate inscription, dating from 1623, is found in a *Kimiya al-sa'adat* of Ghazali. This note goes into depth about the life of its author.[23]

Intriguingly, in the midst of this final period of apparently intense scholarly focus, Muhammad Qutb Shah wrote two inscriptions that, though they are visually indistinguishable from his other notes, are quite different in content and significance. One appears in a copy of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's *Kulliyat*, a work of Dakhni poetry. The manuscript was completed in the royal library in July of 1616 (Rajab 1025) for Muhammad Qutb Shah.[24] The mere fact of his sponsoring the production of a manuscript of Dakhni literature is notable since prior to this, his attention had been almost entirely focused upon Persian and Arabic. Even more remarkably, Muhammad Qutb Shah composed a poem in Dakhni to serve as the manuscript's preface. This is the only known composition by Muhammad in Dakhni.[25] He also inscribed the manuscript (note undated), and while his note is not especially long or elaborate, it treats the author with reverence, describing the volume as "the Kulliyat of his majesty Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, may God illuminate his grave". This sudden and short-lived interest in the Dakhni poetry of his predecessor may have been an attempt to express a connection to Muhammad Quli.

Later that year, Muhammad Qutb Shah penned another surprising note. This time the manuscript itself does not, however, feature content of local significance. It is a copy of the *Kanzu'l-Lughat*, an Arabic-Persian dictionary compiled in the 15th century. Produced in the Qutb Shahi library, presumably at Muhammad's order, it was probably inscribed by the sultan soon after its completion.[26] Of all of Muhammad Qutb Shah's notes, this one has received the most attention as it contains information of use to historians (figure 8). He writes:


SALAR JUNG MUSEUM LIBRARY
( MSS Section )
PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS
Accession No. 4316 MSS No. 113

**8**
*Kanzu'l-Lughat*, Golconda, c. 1616.
Ink and gold on paper. Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, Lug 113. Courtesy Salar Jung Museum.

> *Kanzu'l-Lughat*, completed in the royal library in the hand of Sayyid Ashraf Kateb on the date of the first of the holy month of Dhu'l-Hijja in the year 1025 [December 10, 1616] in the seat of the sultanate, Hyderabad. Written by the pure slave of his master Muhammad Qutb Shah, son of Mirza Muhammad Amin, son of Ibrahim Qutb Shah, son of Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk, son of Uvais Quli, son of Pir Quli, son of Alvand Beg, son of Mirza Iskandar, son of Qara Yusuf, son of Qara Muhammad Turkman. May God increase his favour.

Muhammad Qutb Shah has written here a note that is simultaneously more personal and more political than any other he had written up to this point. After briefly noting the details of the manuscript, he puts down his own lineage, going back more than two centuries to the founder of the Qara Qoyunlu.

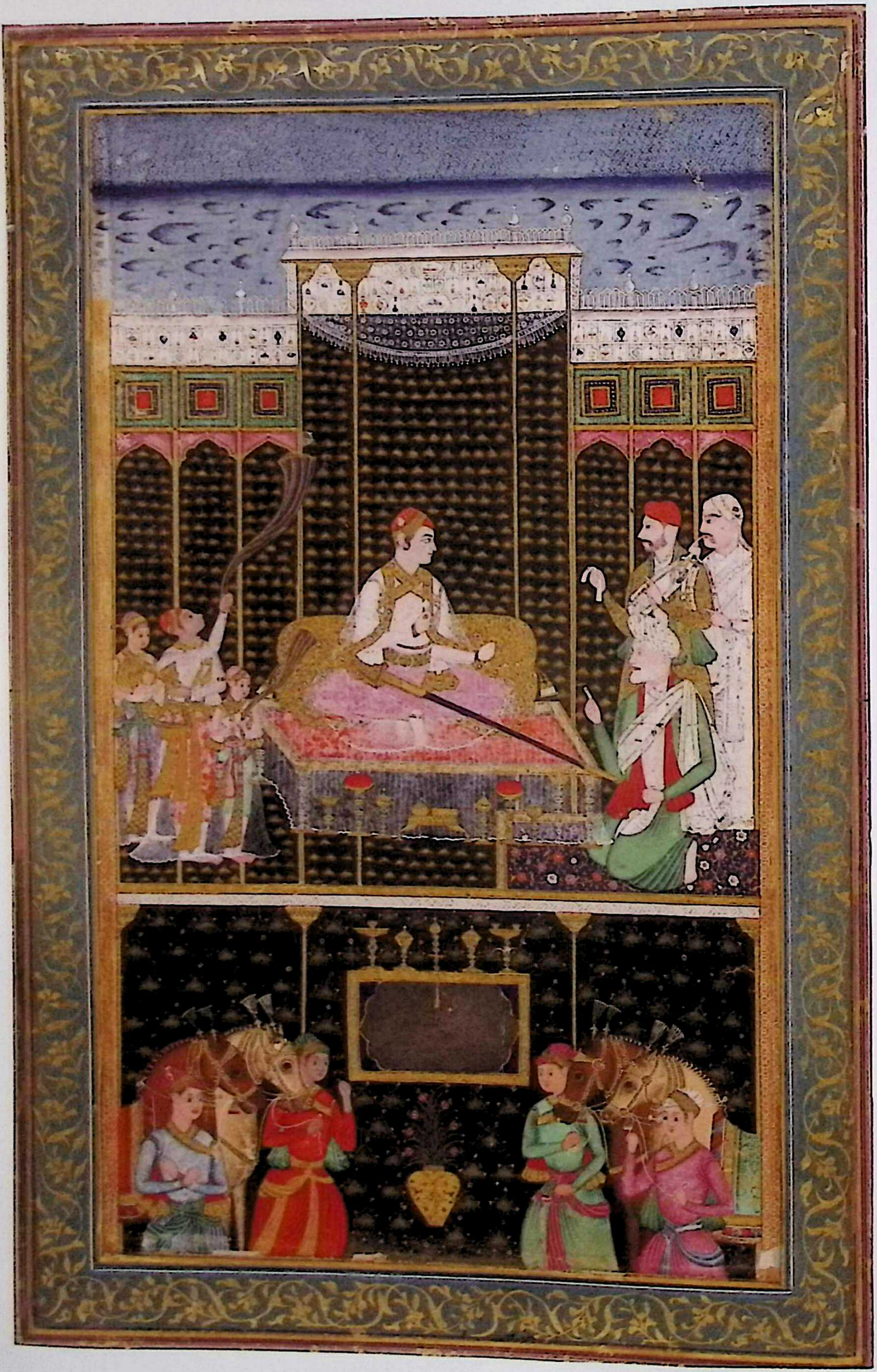
These seemingly aberrant inscriptions, written in the latter part of 1616, were made as the winds of political change began to blow. The autumn of 1616 saw the Mughal emperor Jahangir ordering Prince Khurram to go down to the Deccan to take the place of 'Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan as the head of the Mughal forces in the region, with the goal of finally subjugating the Deccani sultanates. Khurram departed in late October for the Deccan, and soon after sent envoys to Bijapur and Hyderabad to invite their rulers to pay tribute to the Mughals and, in exchange, end hostilities between them. Both Ibrahim 'Adil Shah and Muhammad Qutb Shah agreed to enter into treaties with the Mughals and showered Khurram with gifts to take back to Jahangir. From Hyderabad, Khurram was gifted jewels, elephants, horses and other luxury items. He presented these to Jahangir on December 12, 1616, just two days after Muhammad inscribed his genealogy in the *Kanzu'l-Lughat*.

This was the first time that a Qutb Shahi ruler had paid tribute to the Mughals. Golconda's independence had suffered a devastating blow. Against this backdrop, we can speculate that Muhammad's invocation of his illustrious patrimony was a form of compensation for, or a kind of quiet resistance to, the humiliation of subjugation to the Mughal throne. If an elaborate painting of a Qutb Shahi ruler enthroned with attendants and horses is, as some scholars have argued, a depiction of Muhammad Qutb Shah in November 1616, it too omits any signs of the discord of the moment in favour of presenting the sultan as an impressive young monarch in complete command (figure 9).[27]

Muhammad Qutb Shah returned to his practice of writing long scholarly notes in the years after these events, but there are indications that the shift in his royal position suggested by these two inscriptions was sustained. Most notably, just one year later the erection of the Mecca Masjid in central Hyderabad (figure 2) began, at his order.[28] This mosque is unique among Qutb Shahi architectural monuments. While a full study remains to be done, several remarkable features can be noticed with only a cursory look.

First, while most Qutb Shahi architecture, both before and after the Mecca Masjid, was constructed with cement-rubble masonry faced with stucco, Muhammad's mosque is built of large blocks of solid stone, finely dressed, a much more expensive and demanding mode of construction. The piers holding up the 15 bays of the prayer hall, for example, are hewn of solid stone blocks. According to Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who visited Hyderabad during the reign of 'Abdullah Qutb Shah, the prayer niche (mihrab) was also created out of a single massive piece of stone which took five years and 500–600 men to quarry, and 1,400 oxen to deliver to the building site.[29]

The scale of the building is also noteworthy. Its almost 70-metre-wide prayer hall dwarfs that of Hyderabad's Jami Masjid, which had previously been the city's main place of worship. Across the front of the prayer hall are five huge arched openings supported by six pillars that are each over 2 metres in diameter. The scale of this new mosque may in fact have been too ambitious: it was not finished before Muhammad's death and today is marked by a gateway with an inscription not by its founder but rather by Aurangzeb, who completed it in 1692.



The initiation of such a grand congregational mosque at a moment when Hyderabad had just paid its first tribute to the Mughal empire is worth noting. Undertaken at such a juncture, when Qutb Shahi wealth was still immense even if its independence was reduced, this project seems intended as a public declaration that the grandeur, power and piety of the dynasty would somehow continue.

* * *

It is remarkable that in the early 17th century, both the sultan of Golconda and the Mughal emperor took up the practice of inscribing notes within books in their libraries, a habit nearly unknown in the Islamic world. In many ways, the notes left by Muhammad Qutb Shah in his books are related to those left by Jahangir and later Shah Jahan, and further study will perhaps reveal them to be aware of one another's bibliophilia. But Muhammad's role in the kitabkhana was different in certain respects. Though he was, like the Mughals, a generous and proud patron of the arts of the book, and like them he kept a careful eye on the products of his workshop, he was also a serious scholar who valued books primarily for their textual content. This is in stark contrast to what has been described as "the Mughal context of ostentatious luxury, [where] the appeal of erudition often paled before the more obvious attractions of material preciousness".[30]

Muhammad's consistent description of himself as "the true slave of his Maula" suggests that his piety and dedication were foremost in his mind when working in his library, and this seems to be borne out by the presence of multiple notes written on a single day. The sultan was, it seems, hard at work when in his library. In addition to the role of owner and patron, he served as librarian, contributor and commentator. And as pious as he may have been, he was interested not only in religious texts. Rather, he sponsored and inscribed manuscripts on a wide range of topics including poetry, history and even gemology. The illumination of his notes and their gradually increasing length suggest his intention was not to mark each manuscript as his own and use it to glorify himself, but rather to add to it something that would glorify and enhance its utility, beauty and value.

For a brief time in the year 1616 Muhammad Qutb Shah used the inscribing of manuscripts differently: as a mode of expressing the authority and continuity of the Qutb Shahi dynasty. He may have been inspired by Jahangir's self-glorifying inscriptions in manuscripts of the Mughal library, or perhaps it was the threats to Golconda's autonomy that drove him to invest new meaning in the inscriptions he penned in that year. We may never know for sure what prompted these unusual notes or how Muhammad Qutb Shah determined their content, placement and form, but they offer invaluable insights into his character and career.

9
Durbar of Muhammad Qutb Shah, Golconda, c. 1616. Ink, colour and gold on paper. British Museum, 1937, 4-10 01. © The Trustees of The British Museum.

**Acknowledgements**
Thanks must be given to Sunil Sharma, whose translations and insights into Persian titulature and other topics made this article possible. Thanks also to Wheeler Thackston, Robert Skelton, Phillip Wagoner and Manijeh Bayani for their generous suggestions and critical assistance with portions of this article.

## Notes

1 Studies of this topic are, at this time, increasingly numerous and systematic. For the latest contribution, see Keelan Overton and Jake Benson, "Sources for Deccani Collecting: Seals, Scribal Notations, and Libraries, c. 1400–1630", in Hani Khafipour, ed., *Empires of the Near East and India: Voices from the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal Societies* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

2 Keelan Overton, "Book Culture, Royal Libraries, and Persianate Painting in Bijapur, Circa 1580–1630", *Muqarnas*, 33 (2016), pp. 91–154.

3 The Mughal notations are carefully examined and documented in John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library", *Artibus Asiae*, 57:3/4 (1997), pp. 243–349. No comparably thorough study of Muhammad Qutb Shah's inscriptions has been carried out. The oldest publication of the inscriptions of which I am aware is 'Abdul Haq, "Kulliyat-i Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah", *Urdu* (1922), pp. 23–37. Parts of five notes are translated in H.K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb Dynasty* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), pp. 52 n2, 399–400, 422 n41. Muhammad Ashraf also documented many in catalogues of manuscripts in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad. Three more inscriptions were published in an important recent article: Ali Safari Aq Qala, "Muhr-ha va Yaddasht-ha-yi Sultan Muhammad Qutbshah va Muhr-i Sultan 'Abdullah Qutbshah dar nuskha-ha-yi Kitabkhana-yi Qutbshahiyan", in Muhammad Husain Hakim, ed., *Auraq-i 'Atiq*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Library of the Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament, 2015), pp. 221–50.

4 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation", p. 244.

5 Muhammad Qutb Shah's other notable architectural achievement was the founding of a fortified city east of Hyderabad known as Sultan Nagar, apparently begun in 1620. The city, which is now in an advanced state of ruin, was incomplete at the time of Muhammad's death. In it, the ruler constructed a mosque (possibly begun before 1620) that generally followed Qutb Shahi conventions in its dimensions and decoration. Indeed, the entire settlement seems more in keeping with the cultural practices of his ancestors than any other product of Muhammad Qutb Shah's patronage. One wonders if, had he lived longer, he would have come to adhere more closely to the pattern set by his predecessors. Thanks to Marika Sardar for pointing out this possibility. See Syed Ali Asgar Bilgrami, *Landmarks of the Deccan* (Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1927), no. 14; and Sherwani, *History*, pp. 407–09.

6 Sherwani, p. 405. See also Sunil Sharma, "Forging a Canon of Dakhni Literature: Translations and Retellings from Persian", in Keelan Overton ed., *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture and Talent in Circulation, c. 1400–1700* (forthcoming).

7 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 319.

8 Aq Qala, "Muhr-ha va Yaddasht-ha-yi Sultan Muhammad Qutbshah", p. 225.

9 Telangana (formerly Andhra Pradesh) State Archaeology Museum, Hyderabad, no. 2721. See Muhammad Ghause, *Catalogue of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Manuscripts in the Hyderabad Museum* (Hyderabad: Director, Archaeological Department, Government of Hyderabad, 1953), pp. 94–95.

10 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation", p. 281.

11 Ibid., p. 245.

12 Bibliotheque nationale de France (Paris), Supplement Persan 151 B; State Library (Berlin), Ms. Or. 169. See Francis Richard, "Some Sixteenth-Century Deccani Persian Manuscripts in the Bibliotheque Nationale De France", in Muzaffar Alam, Francoise Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau, eds., *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000), pp. 242, figs. 4 and 5.

13 In most publications on Muhammad Qutb Shah's inscriptions, "al-khalis" is translated as "sincere". This is likely

because of the much more common epithet "al-'abd al-mukhlis" which does mean "sincere slave". It is curious that Muhammad chose to use "al-khalis", which is not a common royal title. Thanks to Wheeler Thackston for sharing his knowledge of these titles.

14 Scott Kugle, "Moula Ali Heritage Precinct in Hyderabad", *Deccan Studies*, XI:2 (July–December 2013), pp. 63–88.

15 Bilgrami, *Landmarks*, p. 21. Muhammad himself used similar formulas in other settings. One of his seals presents him as "slave [bande] of the Shah of Najaf, 'Ali" while another asserts that "the images of Haydar and Safdar [titles of 'Ali] are marked upon my heart, the servant ['abd] Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah". The word slave or servant also appears, though without specific reference to 'Ali, in an inscription referring to Muhammad Qutb Shah as a "lowly servant" (bande-yi khaksar) on a hardstone mortar and pestle. Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), no. 115.

16 Bibliotheque nationale de France (Paris), Supplement Persan 627; Richard, "Some Sixteenth-Century Deccani Persian Manuscripts", pp. 241–42, figs. 1–3.

17 Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ind MS 30, ff. 82v and 225v.

18 The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Inv. no. VR-1000. See Adel T. Adamova, "The Hermitage Manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* Dated 835/1431", *Islamic Art*, V (2001), pp. 53–132. Note that Adamova refers in several places to Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah when she means Muhammad Qutb Shah.

19 The date recorded in the inscription is that on which Muhammad wrote his inscription, not the date of purchase. The evidence for this is that Muhammad Qutb Shah also inscribed another manuscript that day with a brief poetic note much like those on the *Jami* and *Samaniyya* manuscripts. See Muhiuddin Qadri Zore, ed., *Kulliyat-i Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah* (Hyderabad: Maktabah-i Ibrahimiah Mashin Press, 1940), p. 333, image on far left.

20 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, Tas 158. See Muhammad Ashraf, *A Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Salar Jung Museum and Library*, Vol. IV (Hyderabad: Salar Jung Museum and Library, 1967), pp. 253–56.

21 *Rauzat al-Abrar*, Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, H.I. 48. See *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, Vol. VII (Hyderabad: Salar Jung Museum and Library, 1980), p. 112.

22 Thanks to Sunil Sharma for producing this translation.

23 *Kimiya al-sa'adat* of Ghazali, Library of Parliament, Tehran, Manuscript 571. Aq Qala, "Muhr-ha va Yaddasht-ha-yi Sultan Muhammad Qutbshah", pp. 223 and 234.

24 Hyderabad Central Library. The title page of this manuscript is reproduced in Zore, *Kulliyat*, opposite p. 15. See also Sherwani, *History*, pp. 400 and 424 n41.

25 Sherwani, *History*, p. 401.

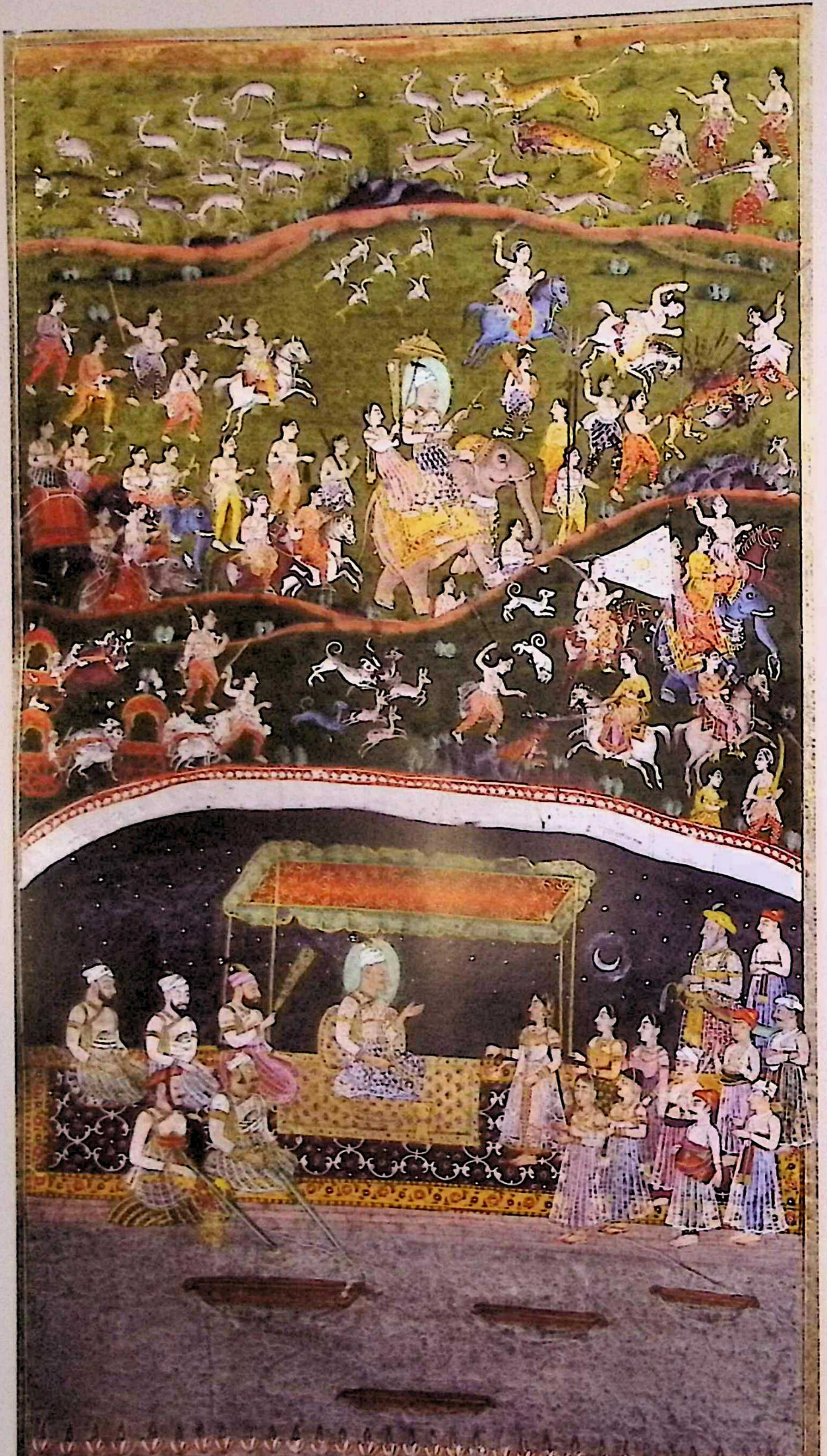
26 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, Lug 113. Sherwani, *History*, pp. 16 and 52 n2.

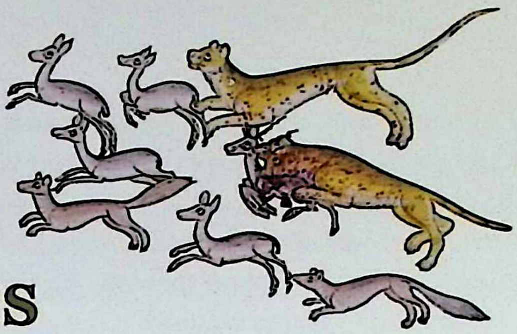
27 This painting may represent the departure of the Qutb Shahi courtier Shaikh Muhammad ibn Khatun for Iran in the company of a Safavid envoy who had been residing in Golconda for two years. J.P. Losty, "The Development of the Golconda Style", in D.E. Barrett and John Guy, eds., *Indian Art & Connoisseurship: Essays in Honour of Douglas Barrett* (Chidambaram and Ahmedabad: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in association with Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1995), p. 312.

28 Bilgrami, *Landmarks*, p. 39.

29 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, tr. Valentine Ball (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), Vol. 1, pp. 153–54.

30 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation", p. 279.





# Weddings and Hunts

## A Visual History of Pleasure in 18th-Century Hyderabad

*Srinayani Lankala*

A late 18th-century illustrated court history, the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* by Shah Tajalli Ali, historian, poet and painter at the court of Mir Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II (r. 1762–1803), allows for an understanding of Indo-Persian history-writing and painting as parallel modes of historical representation. The 78 large paintings that accompany the Persian text form a sequential visual narrative in tandem with the chronological writing of the tarikh or history in words.[1]

Images have long been a source of history. This essay argues that images can also be seen as a form of historiography. Their role in the production of historical knowledge is distinct from that of textual records. Images make visible their historical worlds and their visually tangible nature registers a history that is qualitatively different: a *sense-ible* history (depending on one or more of the senses in materializing the past), unlike history-writing that relies on rational thought to the virtual exclusion of other modes of perception. While occurring in conjunction with the writing, the illustration of a historical manuscript follows its own representational requirements, the delineation of the visually structured narrative bringing into view fresh historical dimensions. The visual production of history thus adds another level to the understanding of the past provided by historical writing.

I examine here the intricate relationship between painting and history in the context of Asaf Jahi painting in Hyderabad. The painted narrative of Shah Tajalli's life of Asaf Jah II is among the most important visual histories of the 18th century. The paintings of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* have been described as depicting razm o bazm, or war and courtly life.[2] A careful reading of the paintings of courtly life, in conjunction with the text they are embedded in, reveals a late 18th-century world of ceremony, sociality and pleasure.

The historical narrative of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, both in images and in words, is structured around events organized as chapters: events narrated in the text of the chapters are visualized in the accompanying paintings.

1
Asaf Jah II on a Hunt with His Zenana, and at an Evening's Entertainment with His Courtiers on the Banks of a Lake, *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* by Shah Tajalli Ali, Hyderabad, late 18th century. Collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. no. 59. 138, f. 127v.

Three chapters from the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*—two of them focused on courtly weddings and a third describing a royal hunt—take visual form in the four paintings that will be discussed here. These chapters narrate events of personal significance and private pleasure that were also occasions of state, and marked publicly. Activities of courtly pleasure are described throughout the text of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* in various contexts, but the three chapters explored in this article through both text and image are exclusively a history of pleasure, giving us an insight not only into the role of aesthetic pleasure in 18th-century society but the contemporary poetic and painterly aesthetics of its representation.

## The Painting of Courtly Weddings: Pageantry and Pleasure

One of the chapters in the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* describes the colourful and joyous celebrations of Nauruz as well as the wedding of the prince Ali Jah Bahadur, the eldest son of Mir Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II, celebrated over a month from August to September 1772.[3]

Shah Tajalli begins the chapter with an invocation of spring, akin to a bahariya tashbib (the spring-inspired prelude of a qasida or ode) in metaphor-laden poetic prose that incorporates a vivid picture of late 18th-century Indo-Persian garden culture. While he has recourse to this form in many places in the manuscript, in this instance, he conjures up connubial imagery centred on his description of flowers as a preamble to the detailed narrative of the nuptials to follow in the chapter.

This culminates in a brief description of the Nauruz durbar, a special assembly, where Asaf Jah II honoured each of his chief nobles with a precious sarpech (turban ornament). Without much ado, Tajalli writes, everyone, according to their rank, was rewarded with gold, pearls, robes of honour, horses or elephants. The courtesan-performers (mughani) who adorned the mehfil invoked good fortune for the realm of the nawab. The author notes that two months after Ordibehesht (April–May, the second month of spring in the Persian calendar), the celebrations of the marriage of Ali Jah Bahadur commenced. The prince married his cousin, the daughter of Shuja al-mulk Basalat Jung, who was the fifth son of Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah I and the younger brother of Asaf Jah II.

The description of the wedding procession, extending over two pages, verges on the visual and anticipates its painting on the next folio. Poetic imagery and intricate detail of material culture, including the colours, the textiles, the variety and brilliance of the lights, contribute to the density of description that traces the movement of the procession. Shah Tajalli describes the rows of "fairy-faced" courtesans who lent grace and glamour to the joyous occasion; the nobility and the courtiers magnificently attired in their finery of silver badla-work, cloths of gold and jewels; everyone present, whether commoner (aʿwam) or of rank (khas), was dressed in the festive colours of saffron, gulnar (the flagrant red of the pomegranate flower) and gulabi (pink), and appeared animated in the heady intoxication and joyous revelry of the evening. He then goes on to give details of the lighting arrangements and the fireworks, the singing, dancing and other entertainment, and the rich feasts that followed. He stresses the astonishing beauty and magnificence of the celebrations, the intensity of the colours that added to the extraordinary brilliance of the lights, the spectacular fireworks, the rapturous music and dancing that accompanied this slowly processing spectacle.

The only painting in this chapter, resplendent in rich colours and profuse gold, represents the shabgasht or ceremonial evening procession on September 23, 1772 in connection with the marriage festivities (figure 2). Densely layered with visual references, metaphors, symbols and closely observed cultural detail, Shah Tajalli writes and paints as a participant.

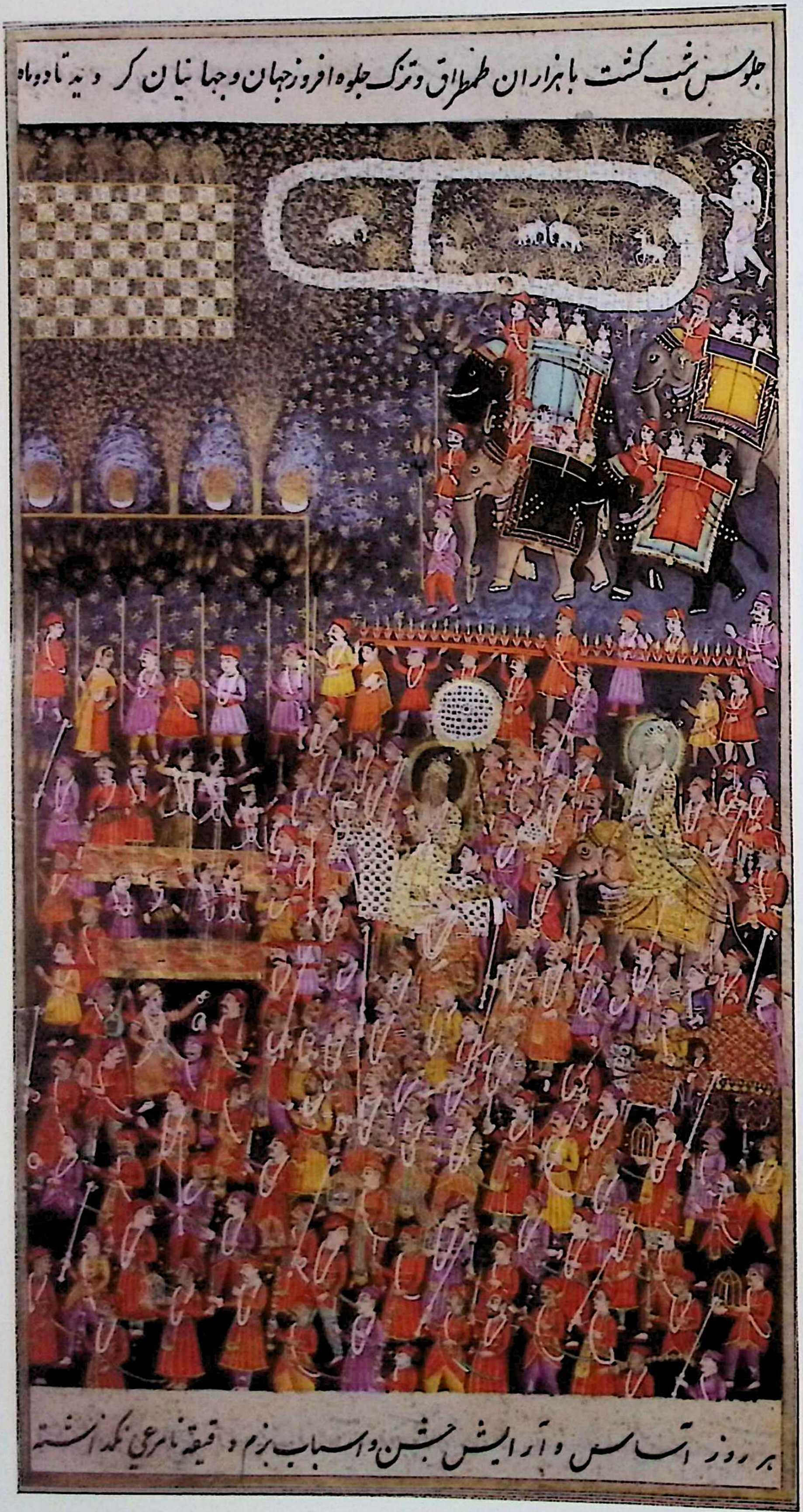
In the text accompanying the painting Tajalli notes, "following the ceremonies of *sachaq* and *hinabandi*, the procession of the *shabgasht*, thousand-splendoured and attended by great pomp and magnificence, illuminated the grandeur of the world and its inhabitants. Every day for two months there were celebrations and not a minute was left unattended by gaiety and festivity."[4]

The display of fireworks occupies the upper part of the pictorial space, erupting in delicate showers of gold in the form of cypresses or dropping florets against the dark grey ground of the painting that suggests the night. Tajalli writes, "What does one say of the surfeit of fireworks, but that the world was deluged in a shower of inflamed flowers."

The painting of the event in many ways exceeds its description in words. The text makes no reference, for instance, to the vignette in the uppermost part of the painting, of miniature white elephants and deer in an enclosure, just outside which is painted a white, tailed mythical creature, seemingly in a forest of golden fireworks, whose relation to the event depicted is not immediately clear.[5] The chequerboard pattern on the upper left contains astrological symbols, and reflects Shah Tajalli's interest in astrology. The painting also suggests that he was familiar with Indo-Persian visual vocabulary and literature.[6] These are not allusions commonly found in other 18th-century court paintings.

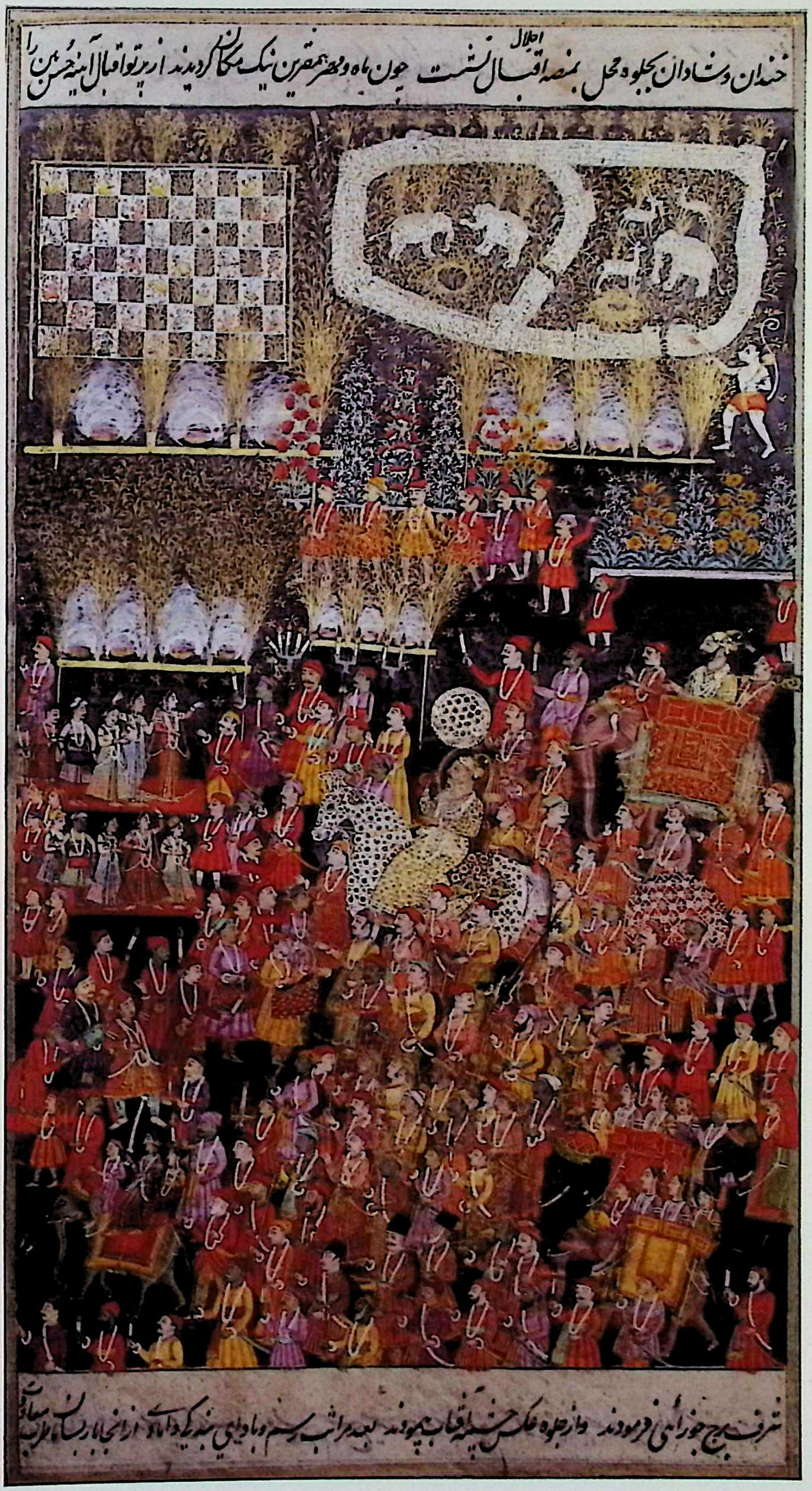
Below the fireworks to the left is carried a metal frame fixed with enormous camphor lights and metal spouts at the top from which flare up anar-like sprays of fire. Carried along with it are torches on long poles, some with five flames and some with two. To the right four elephants accompany the procession. Glittering courtesans ride in their open howdahs. A pageant of lamps, arranged row upon row and carried on planks, appears as a roving garden of lights that accompanies the parade. On the left below there are dancers, accompanied by musicians, performing on the takht-e-rawan (mobile platform with poles borne by men), while a male dancer performs below in the midst of the juloos or procession that occupies the lower half of the painting. The entire work is a celebration of the spectacular. The festivity is here represented as a performance of power, and a grand display that underlines the majesty of the monarch.

Asaf Jah II is portrayed here in the wedding procession of his eldest son riding his elephant, and Ali Jah rides before him on a richly caparisoned horse with hennaed legs. This is the only portrait of Ali Jah in the entire manuscript. In this painting of his


جلوس شب گشت باهزاران طمطراق وتزک جلوه افروز جهان وجهانیان گردید تا دو ماه
هر روز اساس و آرایش جشن و اسباب بزم دقیقه نامرعی نگذاشته

2
Shabgasht Procession at the Wedding of Ali Jah Bahadur, Eldest Son of Asaf Jah II, *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* by Shah Tajalli Ali, Hyderabad, late 18th century. Collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. no. 59. 138, f. 93v.

3
Shabgasht Procession of Saif al-mulk, Son of the Minister Aristu Jah, *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* by Shah Tajalli Ali, Hyderabad, late 18th century. Collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. no. 59. 138, f. 151v.


اجلال
خندان و شادان بجلوه محل بمنصه اقبال نشست چون ماه و مهر همقرین نیک مکان گردیدند از پرتو اقبال آینه حسن بن را
شرف برج جوزائی فرمودند و از جلوه عکس خجسته نقاب بپیوند بعد مراتب رسم و بادیای بندگی داماد از انجا بار بساط طرب سعادت

wedding he is portrayed bejewelled and dressed in clothes of gold embroidered with gems, wearing a sehra of pearls before his face and swathed in jasmine garlands. He holds a red handkerchief in his hennaed hand. The aftabi (sun-shade) and morchhals (peacock-feather flywhisks) carried on either side of him, and the regal halo, indicate his status as heir. The rest of the garlanded assembly accompanies the bridegroom on foot, each individual portrayed carrying a candlestick or a glass candleholder. Some of them carry floral staffs. A lavishly decorated bullock-cart is visible at the lower right, perhaps bearing gifts. While the text abounds in evocative and poetic detail, this kind of vivid material representation of a late 18th-century cultural aesthetic can only be achieved through the painting.

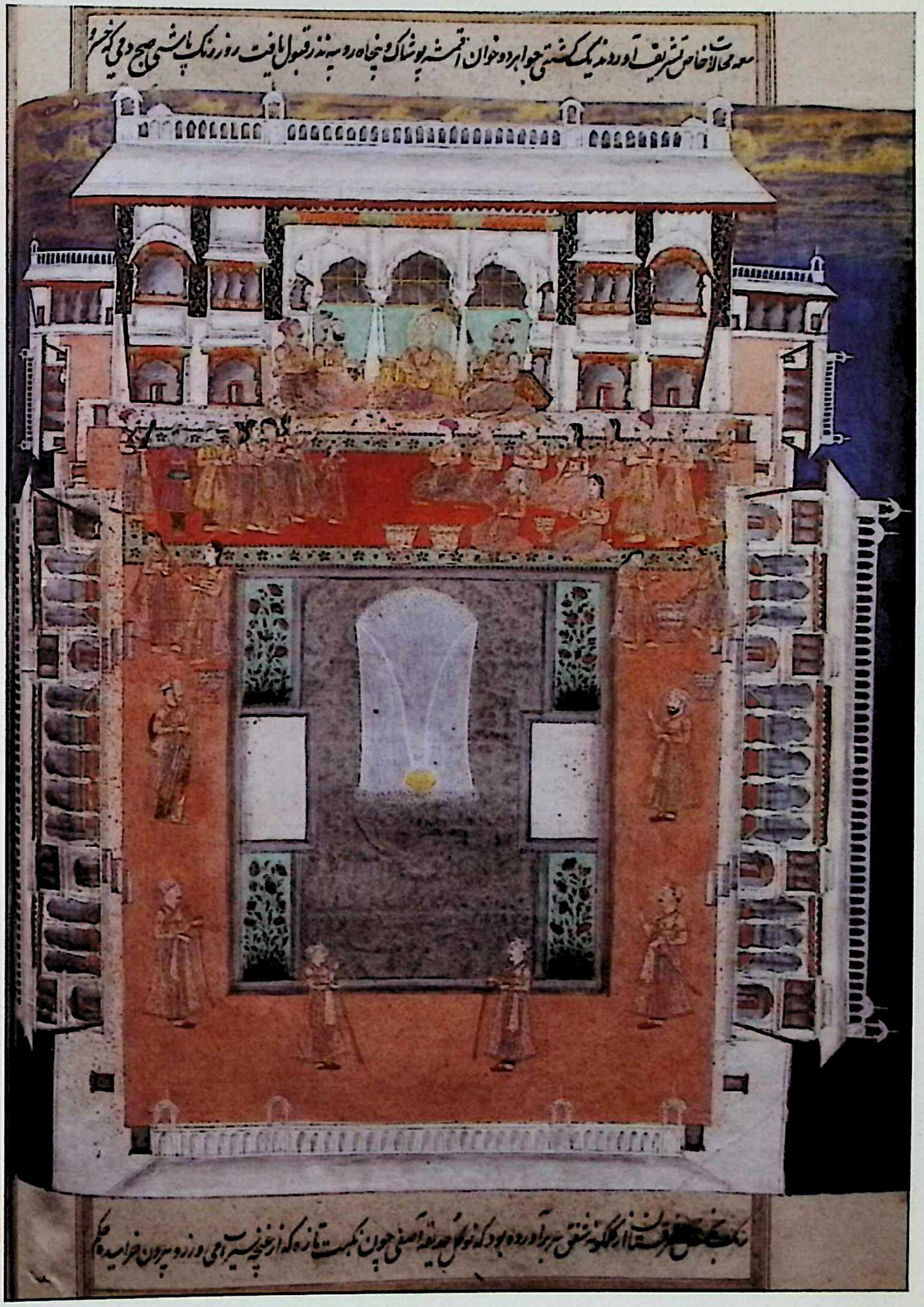
The painting represents a single event, that of the wedding procession, which is also the predominant event in the chapter. The preliminary description of the Nauruz durbar, and the recounting of the honours and awards to the nobility that the chapter ends with are not visually represented. In other chapters of the manuscript multiple events are composed within the frame of a single painting, or a number of paintings dealing with different events make up the chapter, and may more closely approximate the written narrative. The writing of the text the paintings are embedded in offers a mode of engaging with what is visually represented. The visual and written narratives, while closely related, are not illustrative of each other. The text of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* contains a wealth of historical detail that is not always possible to translate into visuality. And as we have seen, the visual narrative of the history exceeds its writing in important ways.

Another painting in the manuscript represents a shabgasht that opened out the wedding festivities into the space of the city. This is the wedding procession of Saif al-mulk,[7] the son of the powerful diwan or minister Aristu Jah, which equalled the prince's in grandeur (figure 3). In a history of Asaf Jah II, an entire painting devoted to the minister and his son indicates his importance. The two paintings of wedding processions, which contain nearly identical motifs and similarities of palette and pictorial conception, offer an interesting comparison when viewed together. Shah Tajalli's textual description of the two weddings, separated by a decade, is also in very similar terms. While there are references to numerous weddings in the course of the written narrative, these are the only two that are each detailed over the length of a chapter and visually represented. The wedding of Saif al-mulk is in fact the subject of two paintings, each depicting a different ceremony.

At the end of a chapter dealing with the ministership of Mushir al-mulk Bahadur Aristu Jah, Shah Tajalli mentions the wedding of his son with the daughter[8] of Ashja al-mulk, heir of the late Munir al-mulk, former diwan. He writes that for one month, not a moment was left unattended by joyousness in the arrangement of feasts, parties and celebrations with great pomp and grandeur. Tajalli notes that Azim al-daulah Bahadur was responsible for the decoration, adornment and preparation of this paradisiacal party (folios 148–52).

On the fifth of Zi-Hijja 1197 AH (November 1, 1783), Asaf Jah II himself, with the principal members of his mahallat (harem), visited the residence of Mushir al-

4
Mir Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II at the Rang-Pashi Ceremony at the Palace of the Minister Aristu Jah on the Occasion of the Wedding of his Son Saif al-mulk with the Daughter of Ashja al-mulk, *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* by Shah Tajalli Ali, Hyderabad, late 18th century. Collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, Inv. no. 59. 138, f. 149v.



mulk Aristu Jah for the ceremonies connected to the wedding. He accepted a nazr of a tray of jewels, two trays of textiles and 50,000 rupees (folio 149v). Early on the day of the rang-pashi ceremony, walking out in stately grace, he gave the order for the colour-play to commence, and this is the subject of figure 4.

In this image, Mir Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II sits on a special masnad in Aristu Jah's palace and before him are the minister and his son Saif al-mulk (in the text, Shah Tajalli refers to Saif by his current title Mushir al-daulah). Tegh Jung, holding the morchhal, sits behind him. The space of the ceremony in the minister's palace is represented in unusual perspective extending beyond the margins of the page. An aerial perspective combined with a frontal view brings together the spatial representation of the architecture with the intricate portraiture and depiction of the event in the courtyard of the divankhana (hall of audience or court).

In a haze of colour-spray the guests are portrayed standing around the central fountain, while parties of musicians, singers and dancers perform at the ceremony. Beautiful young courtesans fill their pichhkaris from large urns of coloured water. As Tajalli writes, "...with the men and women drowned in colour, spring appeared to erupt anew" (folios 149v and 150). Members of the zenana, although mentioned in the text, are not shown in the painting.

Shah Tajalli Ali was an intimate member of the minister's circle and was present at the ceremony. His description of the wedding is also an eyewitness account. Nearly an entire chapter in chronogrammatic verse describes the wedding including the shabgasht—"A history of the *jashn-e-shadi* of Mushir al-daulah Bahadur, son of Mushir al-mulk madar al-maham."[9]

Tajalli writes that after the requisites of sachaq (a pre-wedding rite involving presents sent to the bride) were concluded, the pleasure-giving arrangements for the shabgasht or evening procession were made on the 20th of Zi-Hijja (November 16, 1783). Of the bridegroom surrounded by elite courtiers walking in procession, Tajalli says, "like the moon in robes of badla in a moving constellation of stars, on a swift, white horse he rode". Continuing in verse, he writes, "dark-haired brides of the evening (courtesans), from the elite assemblies reached the resplendent world. The young bridegroom shone like the moon of the sky, joyous with pomp and dazzling splendour, mounted on the sun-like steed, also beauteous and bejewelled. The happy clamour of the exuberant drums and the voices rising in congratulations. All the world shared in the traditions of pleasure. The fireworks erupting in colourful plants and flowers, turned the surface of the land into a garden of Eram. The whole environment presented a canvas that was the envy of a painter or picture collector. The abundance of moonlight wove a spread of silver on the sheet of the land. With the incessant shower of flowers like strings of knotted pearls, the very air, full of flowers, appeared a spring garden. The rising of the *Bhumi Champa* (a kind of firework that looked like the flower of that name) traversed a lunar mansion of the sky. The radiance of the moon and the shower of fiery flowers coloured the earth and sky as one. The brilliance of the lights filled the eyes of men." The verses go on to describe the arrival of the bridegroom at the palace of the bride and the marriage ceremony at an auspicious hour towards morning, following which they returned with the bride (folio 151).

The painting of the shabgasht in this chapter (figure 3) represents in intricate detail the various kinds of fireworks, the mobile garden of flowering shrubs carried on plank-beds, the dancers on the takht-e-rawan, the nobility on foot, courtesans riding on their elephants in the midst of the procession, and the festive torch-bearers. Aristu Jah follows the bridegroom on his elephant. Remarkably similar to the earlier painting of Ali Jah's shabgasht, there are only minor variations—for instance, the absence of royal halos, although a slight halo marks the bridegroom's special status for the day.

In the upper part of the painting there is a repetition of the jinn-like figure (carrying a mace here) and a vision of white elephants and deer in a firmament of fireworks. There is also what appears to be a complex astrological table, this time with the signs of a dove, cockerel, heron, other birds, animals and anthropomorphic figures.

The only women depicted in the paintings of shabgasht are performers, courtesans and attendants. Women of the zenanas did not participate in the procession. Indeed they are mostly absent in the visual narrative of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, making an appearance in only a few paintings.[10] One of these depicts members of the zenana taking active part in a hunt.

### Picturing Pleasure: Hunts, Feasts and Festivities

While there are references to innumerable hunts throughout the manuscript, there is only one painting of this subject, and interestingly it includes members of the zenana as participants.

Representing the intersection of private and courtly life, it shows Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II on a hunt with the ladies of his zenana (figure 1). It is a painting in two registers, separating day and night. The upper half of the painting is a lively scene of the course of the day's hunt. In the lower half the nizam, accompanied by his courtiers, is seated on a gold masnad under a richly embroidered canopy enjoying an evening of music and dance by the lake.

Shah Tajalli devotes a chapter to the description of a hunt organized for Asaf Jah II and his zenana, followed by the Nauruz celebrations. On folio 125v, he writes "…every year, Asaf Jah II left for the hunting grounds (*shikargah*) prepared for him with those of his intimate circle who were honoured to accompany him. Setting out with a great train of horsemen and equipage, day and night arrangements were made for camp, the tents set up and the gardens laid. In this auspicious year [1781 CE], on the bank of the lake Sangraj,[11] about two *kroh* [about 5 miles or 8 km] to the east of the city of Hyderabad, under the charge of Shams al-mulk Bahadur, arrangements were made for a magnificent *shikargah*." Wild deer and antelope of the plains were let loose in the enclosure. At this point Shah Tajalli launches into a poetic description of the hunting grounds, aswarm with beautiful damsels and gazelles.

Asaf Jah II, at an auspicious time, set out with his zenana for the hunt. There is a visual description of the hunt in the painting of this chapter (figure 1). The upper half of the painting details the hunt in progress in the enclosed grounds of the shikargah. His wives joined the hunt on horseback or on elephants. Just as Tajalli mentions in the text, "the women rode in the shadow of the flag of grandeur and illuminated the grounds of that *shikargah* with their presence", the Asafiya standard is visible in the lowest register to the right, carried by two women on elephantback. The undulating grounds of the shikargah are used to divide the representation of hunt into three registers. Here too, Asaf Jah II occupies the main position in the central register. He is portrayed driving his own elephant, and the woman seated behind him, holding the morchhal and the royal umbrella, may be Tahniat-un-nissa Begum, one of his chief wives. Asaf Jah II, who is portrayed on a larger scale than the other figures, does not appear to be actively engaged in the chase; rather he is portrayed indulgently surveying the scene as sole lord of a multitude of women. The representations of members of his zenana are clearly not based on likenesses. None of the figures, other than the nizam, is an individualized portrait (in contrast to the portraits of the courtiers in the section below).

Shah Tajalli describes the shikargah as an enclosure of 12 kroh (75 km or about 30 miles), which is represented in the painting as a hilly tract of verdurous grassland (marghzar), dotted with rocks, shrubs and trees. This is a qamargah hunt and while the green camouflaging robes favoured for other forms of hunting are not necessary here, green is still the dominant colour in this depiction.[12] The painting communicates the teeming bustle and excitement of the hunt. In the upper register, there are blackbuck, hare and fox chased by hunting leopards (cheetahs) and a group of four women, one of whom fires her musket. A flock of cranes take flight at the top of the middle register, above the nizam's elephant. Other wives and concubines ride into view on their own elephants or on horseback behind Asaf Jah II, one of them with a falcon perched on her outstretched arm. To the right, two women, one of them on horseback, have turned fiercely on a cheetah with their spears, as it preys on a blackbuck. A woman on a blue horse rides up to join them, sword drawn. A great number of serving women join the hunt on foot, their long flowing jamas hitched up, carrying spears, swords, shields and arrow-holders. Ornate bullock-wagons that some of the women may have ridden in are parked in the left corner of the lowest register. Hunting dogs chase the antelopes, while behind some rocks on the lowest edge, a horsewoman has brought her sword down on a tiger, while another on foot spears it. The scene of the hunt is visually separated from the scene of the evening's entertainment below by the tent wall enclosing it. While the composition of the painting as a whole is vertical, with a high horizon barely indicated with a fringe of orange-gold sky, it is divided horizontally across the middle and the thrust of the representation in both halves is horizontal, emphasized by a series of parallel horizontals.

Describing the days of shikar, Tajalli writes (folio 126):

> Every day they mounted to hunt. While the grasslands of the hunting enclosure may have appeared to rouse the envy of the spring of *Eram*, the summer had set in and turned the grounds into a field of fire. The heat wave was such that every drop of perspiration seared. The very stones appeared ready to melt like wax in the heat of the sun. The fish stewed themselves in the water. Should anyone seek out a bit of shade, he would find himself a still smouldering ember under the shade.

Going on in this vein, he notes a few lines later:

> In this season of soaring temperatures, by the order of His Highness, Shams al-daulah Bahadur ensured at every place, under the shade of the trees pitchers of cold water infused with rose essence. Everyone, noble or commoner, quenched their thirst and appeared relieved. Among the variety of dishes served on the occasion, were biryani, muthanjan, savoury kebabs, sweet dishes and fruit, sherbet of pomegranates and other pleasantly cooling things to suit the desire

> of every palate. The tastes of all the world were there to be savoured and no one went disappointed from these trays of rich food.

In the lower half of the painting, on an evening during the period of Nauruz, following Holi, Asaf Jah II is portrayed seated on his masnad of gold cloth under a canopy, as mentioned in the text (folio 126v). He is seen enjoying the music and dance in the company of five of his principal courtiers seated behind him, three of whom can be identified as Aristu Jah holding the morchhal, Tegh Jung at his side, and behind him Ghansi Mian. The young courtesan performing before Asaf Jah II at the head of the party of dancers may be Mah Laqa Bai Chanda, then in her early teens.[13] The Sangraj talab (lake), the site of the evening's entertainment, 1 kroh (about 4 km) in length and width, was surrounded by an arresting display of lamps by the nizam's order. Planks of lamp-beds were floated on the surface of the pond amidst the reflection of the lights on the banks. Boat after boat filled with light, brimming with candles and lamps, drifted on the waters. Tajalli's extravagant description of the scene conjures a word-picture parallel to the painting (folio 127):

> The advancing vanguard of the rays of the lamps shone with such warmth that the stars of the sky broke out in a sweat. Accepting the reflection of the candles and lamps the surface of the lake turned into another star-filled sky.... Sweet-tongued singers and melodious minstrels were heard in every direction, producing heartrendingly beautiful strains.... The hum of singing, the rhythm of dancing feet, the pleasing sound of anklets, and the liver-tearing lament transported to ecstasy the inhabitants of the third heaven. Asaf Jah II himself was variously occupied, sometimes with the arrangements of his household (*mahalat*), sometimes on a jaunt with his nobles and sometimes issued orders permitting the public; and the people of the city and the surrounding villages came to view the spectacle of the royal pageant (*jashn-e-sultani*) and were overawed with the beauty of the glittering light from the excess of lamps and the songs of the fairy-like. At the conclusion of the days of *Nauruz*, the jaunts and hunts were resumed, and as was customary, everyday a hundred deer were surrounded.

This painting could perhaps be interpreted as a biographical document representing days of pleasure in the life of Asaf Jah II, or a record of courtly life that encompassed the personal and the sphere of private pleasure within a public ritual.[14] Although the Nizam hunted with the ladies in a separate enclosure, Tajalli clearly describes the social nature of the feast and festivities organized on the occasion.

Descriptions of hunt along with war and court life formed the mainstay of Indo-Persian court histories. Indeed Shah Tajalli prefaces the chapter with a discourse on hunting as an appropriate princely recreation and part of the courtly life of the sovereign. He notes that Asaf Jah II continued to conduct state business from his shikargah encampment.[15]

The painting sought to capture no specific hunt but the fact that Asaf Jah II regularly went for such hunts with the zenana, a fact that was worth recording and representing in his visual biography. While women at hunt have been represented in both Mughal and Deccani painting, which may have served as pictorial precedents, hunting scenes of the ruler with his zenana are not common.

### Text and Image in the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*

The writing of this history approaches the visual in its extraordinarily vivid description, aesthetics and imagery. The word-pictures composed by the author suggest the eye of a painter, bringing his writing closer to the world of images.

Shah Tajalli as both author and painter draws an extraordinary relationship between text and image. We rarely have such an instance where the author has translated his record of an event in words into a painted record, with both having parallel lives in one text. Tajalli straddles the different worlds of representation, opening each out to the other in a symbiotic relationship.

While this essay approaches the paintings through the accompanying text, the scope of the paintings is not determined by it. Images both exceed and remain forever deficient in relation to words. What is the nature of this painterly "excess" and what significance does it have for the history portrayed therein?

The nature of visual representation materializes historical worlds, revealing details that rarely find place in writing. "Seeing" an event alters the quality of our historical understanding. A palace, as the site of a pre-wedding ceremony for instance, may only be mentioned in the written account of the event. The painting of the event must perforce show us the site of the event, carefully delineating the palace, its style of architecture, the structure of its buildings, its courtyards, gardens, fountains, such as we see in figure 4. The visual representation of the ceremony at the palace details the physiognomy of the participants, their gestures and activities, their mode of dress and other material cultural details. The dancers we see performing on mobile planks in paintings of the procession, for instance, find no mention in Tajalli's elaborate and poetic description.

The quality of historical imagination deployed in the painting of an event necessarily differs from the written narrative, even as it appears alongside. In addition to its narrative intervention, the layers of visual, cultural and spatial details of the painted text connote a rich subtext of historical meaning. Yet specificities detailed in the text and the background to the event, which are impossible to convey in the painting, emphasize the limits of pictoriality.

The scope of the written narrative can far exceed the visual in its contextualization of an event, the very structure of its narration and the sequence and chronology it depends on. We do not know from the painting of the hunt that the arrangements were made by Shams al-daulah, or of the feasting that followed. These are details only the text can give us.

The space of a painting is very different. The history can only approach in words the degree of materialization that a painting is contingent on. The painting of history can exceed its telling, in the showing. It is in this visual excess, that the painted narrative in turn, transcends the written. The visual and verbal are, however, interdependent. A more composite history emerges out of these coexistent narratives.

## Notes

1 Now in the National Museum, New Delhi. Inv. no. 59. 138. A dynastic history, Tajalli's narrative deals primarily with the life and reign of his patron Asaf Jah II. The Asaf Jahs of Hyderabad, a post-Mughal successor dynasty, came to power in the Deccan in 1724, and continued to rule until their state acceded to the Indian Union in 1948.

2 Laik Salah, *Ahed-e-Aristu Jah*, (Hyderabad: Shugufa Publications, 1986).

3 *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, National Museum manuscript, ff. 91v–94; see also *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad from 1720 to 1890* (Hyderabad: The Central Records Office, Government of Hyderabad, 1954), pp. 41–42.

4 Translations of the text are by the present writer.

5 The figure is reminiscent of similar fantastical beings from *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat wa-Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat*, and may be an inter-pictorial reference that is as yet unclear in the context of the shabgasht.

6 The painting, although local in detail and idiosyncratic in its allusions, is in the lineage of wedding pictures from the *Padshahnama* and later Mughal painting. See for instance a near-contemporary 18th-century painting of the wedding procession of Dara Shikoh by Madni Haji, now in the National Museum, New Delhi. The paintings of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* are closely related to Mughal precedents, drawing on the historical and spatial concerns of Mughal painting, but painted in an entirely Deccanized idiom.

7 This was a later title of Ghulam Murtaza Khan, popularly known as Ma'ali Mian. See Tamkeen Kazmi, *Aristu Jah*, ed. Laik Salah (Hyderabad: Shugufa Publications, 2002), p. 104.

8 Farzand Begum, whose maternal grandfather was Dargah Quli Khan Salar Jung. See Kazmi, *Aristu Jah*, pp. 144–45.

9 Tajalli writes that "the humble author of this *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya* put together a special account of this happy occasion (the wedding) in a fine metaphorical style, in a genre of rhymed verse, each line of which yielded the date." He further notes that he was amply rewarded and applauded for his efforts.

10 Women, although in purdah, certainly played an important role in the courtly life of 18th-century Hyderabad. There are numerous references to them in the text as well as other court records. The paintings of the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, however, in making visible courtly life are often at a loss to include them without depicting them and making them visible.

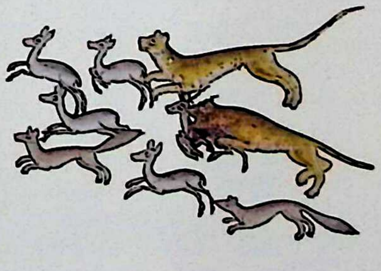
11 Possibly what has come to be known as the Saroornagar lake.

12 In the qamargah hunt the game is driven towards the centre of an extensive circular area where the animals are then killed. Shades of green dominated later Mughal paintings of the decoy hunt, and the Mughal court eventually adopted green robes for all forms of hunting. See Ebba Koch, *Dara Shikoh Shooting Nilgais: Hunt and Landscape in Mughal Painting* (Washington DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1998), p. 25.

13 From the resemblance to other inscribed, albeit later, portraits of her in the State Museum and Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad.

14 In the context of the Mughal hunt, Ebba Koch notes the self-representation of the ruler as a hunter and the personal, even spiritual, experiences possible for the emperor in the midst of these very public rituals of state. See her *Dara Shikoh Shooting Nilgais*.

15 As mentioned in the text, it was here that he received news of the death of Zabit Jung, one of his chief military commanders who held the Nirmal fort in jagir. Asaf Jah II dispatched a khillat of condolence to his son Ihtsam Jung and confirmed him in his position and possessions (folio 128).



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